SCI-FI

AN ENTERTAINING EC COMIC

VOL.II №1

CRUEL UNIVERSE™

AN ENTERTAINING EC COMIC

AUG

BIZARRE TALES OF TIME AND SPACE

CRUEL UNIVERSE VOL. II Nº1

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CRUEL UNIVERSE™

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November 1953
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Letters by
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ENTERTAINING
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Hughes

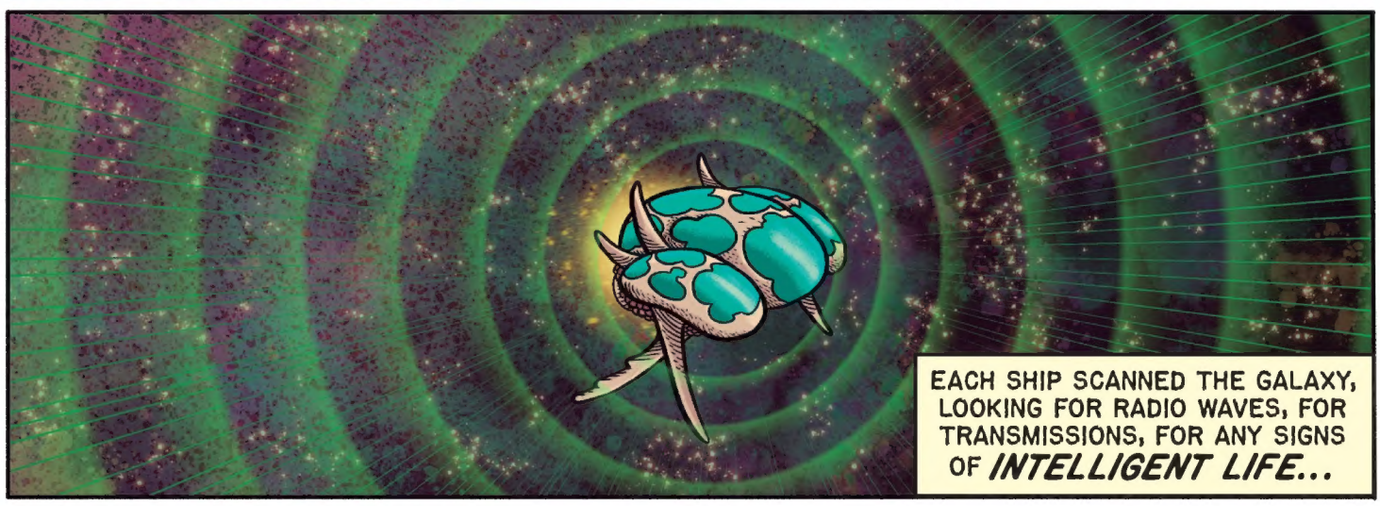
IN A STRANGE LAND

WE CONDUCTED AN IMMENSE AMOUNT OF RESEARCH BEFORE APPROACHING THIS WORLD...

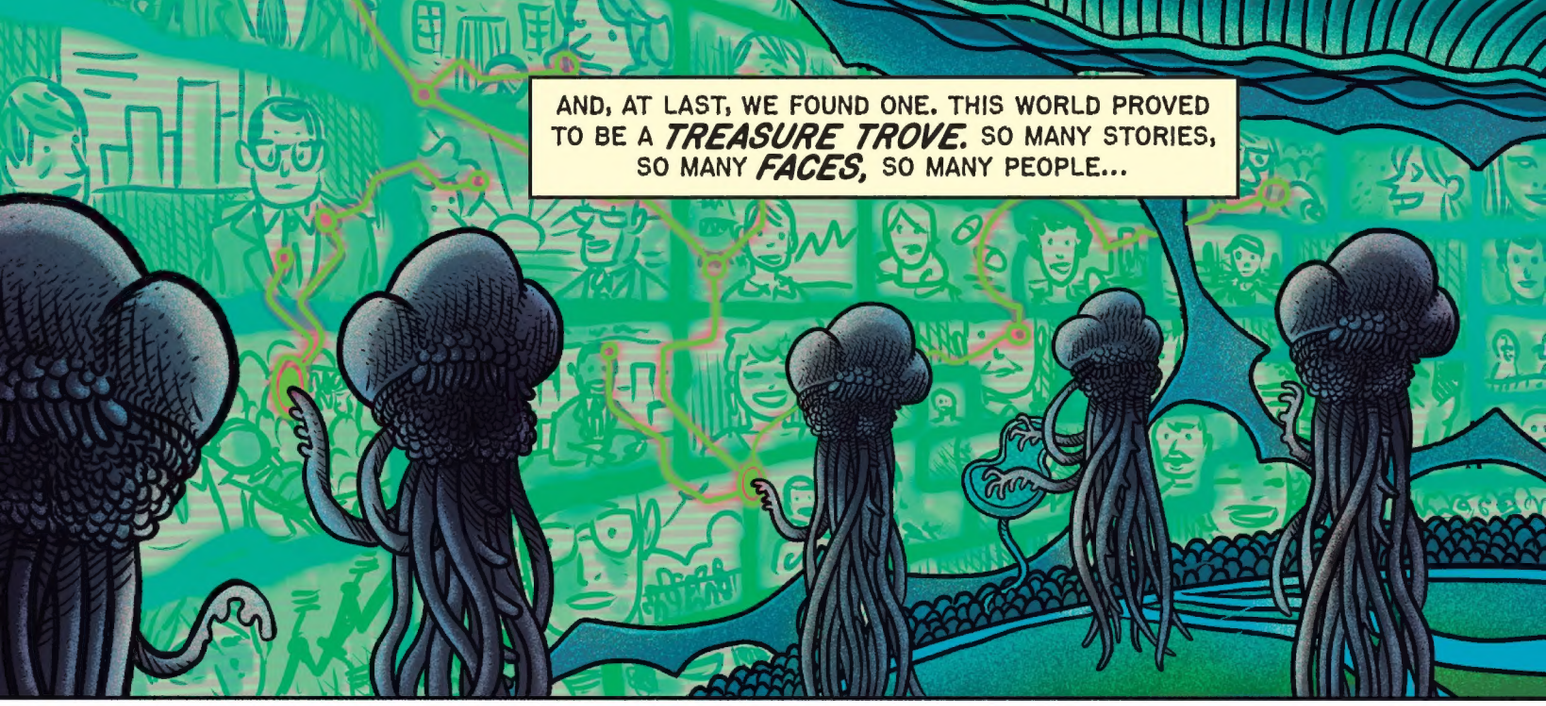
...WE HAD HOPES, HIGH HOPES, THAT THIS ***BEAUTIFUL WORLD*** COULD BE A NEW HOME FOR US. A PLACE WE COULD SETTLE, A PLACE WE COULD MAKE OUR OWN.

OUR OWN HOMEWORLD HAD FALLEN INTO ***RUIN.*** WE'D WORKED FOR YEARS TO STAVE OFF ITS DESTRUCTION...BUT WE RAN OUT OF TIME.

WE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO LEAVE OUR WORLD, GO INTO ***THE VOID,*** AND FIND SOMEWHERE TO BUILD AGAIN.

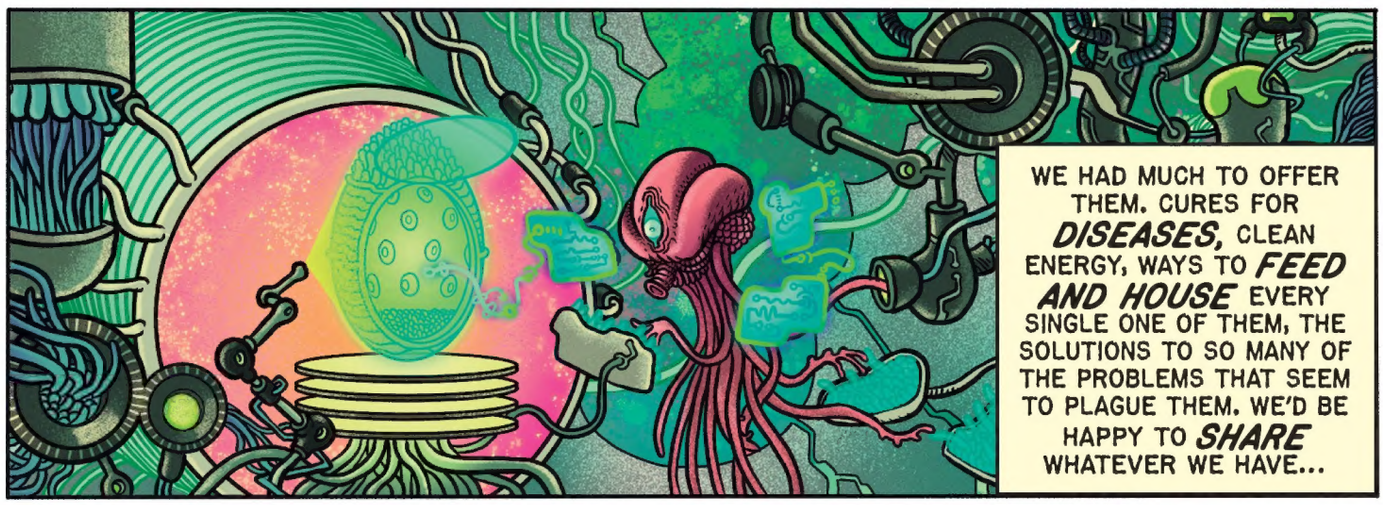


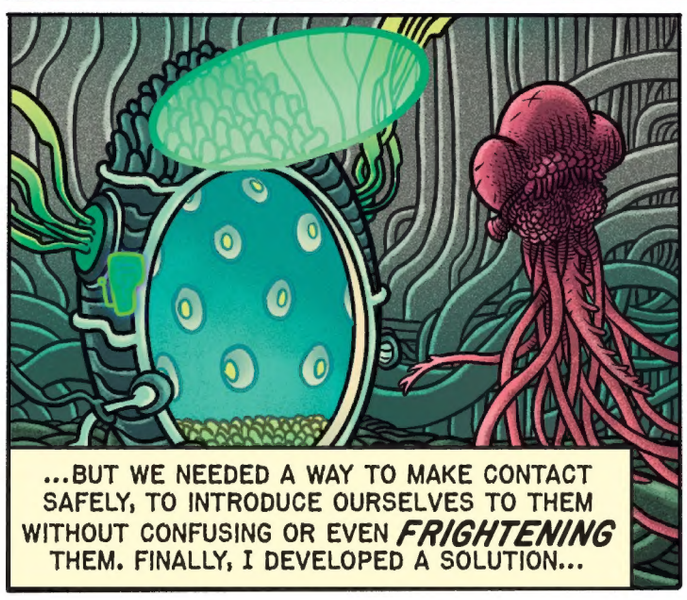
EACH SHIP SCANNED THE GALAXY, LOOKING FOR RADIO WAVES, FOR TRANSMISSIONS, FOR ANY SIGNS OF ***INTELLIGENT LIFE...***

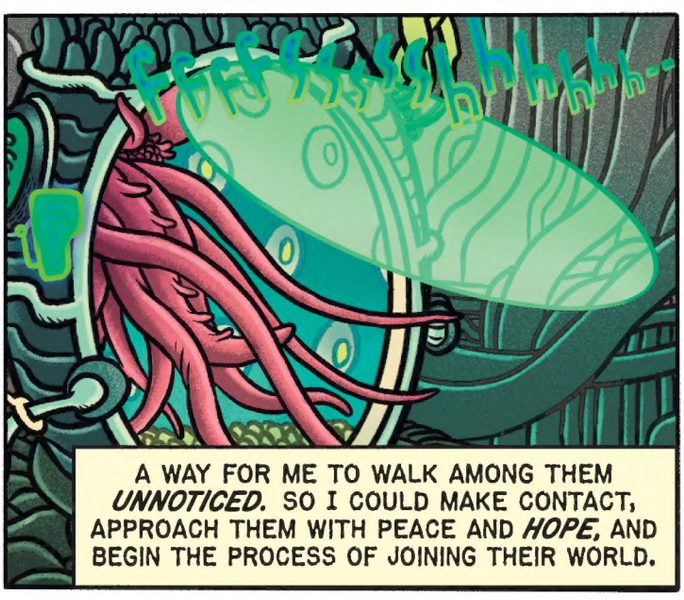

AND, AT LAST, WE FOUND ONE. THIS WORLD PROVED TO BE A TREASURE TROVE. SO MANY STORIES, SO MANY FACES, SO MANY PEOPLE...

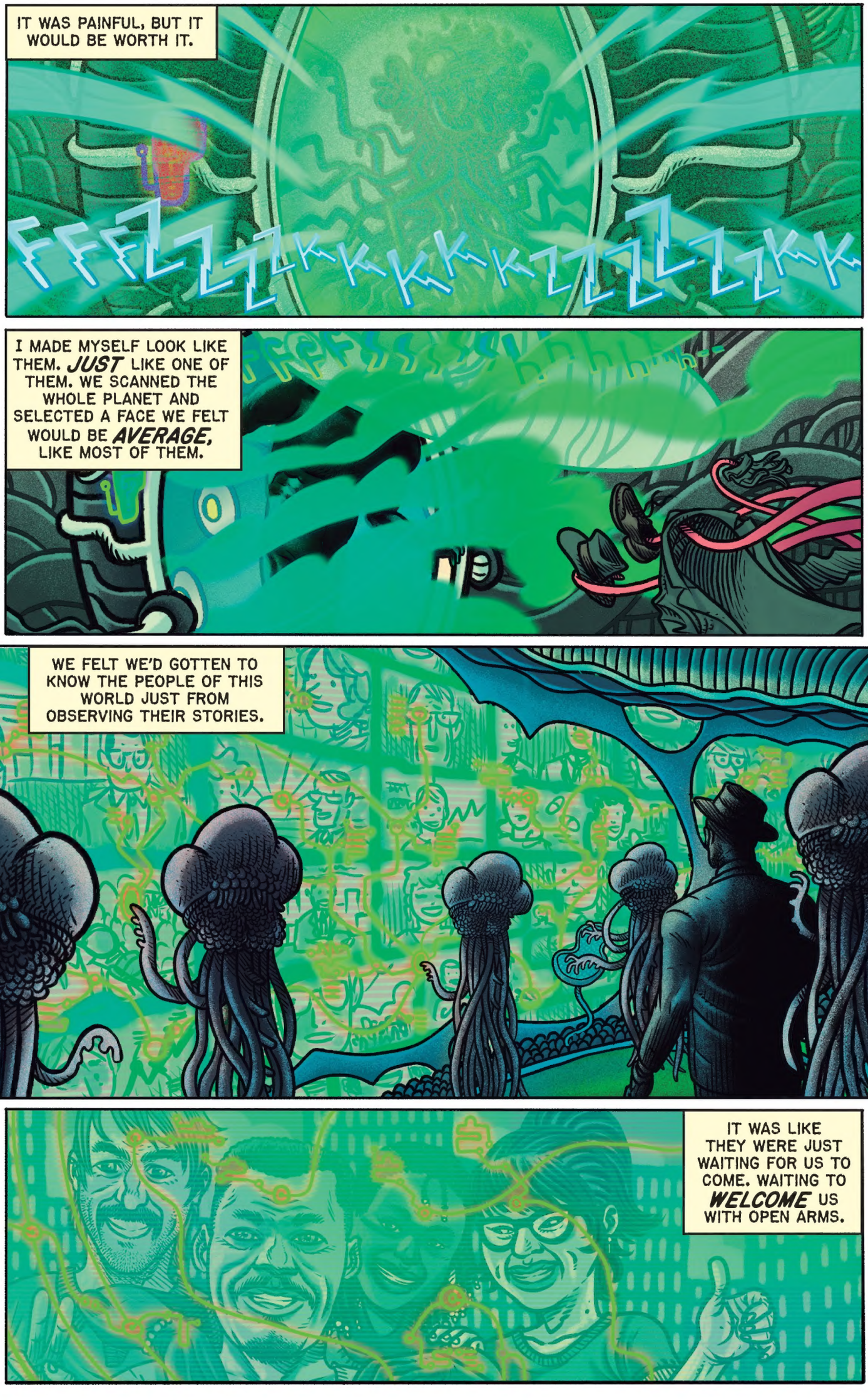
WEST COAST NEWS
TRULY AN INTELLIGENT WORLD. BUT THERE WAS JUST ONE PROBLEM...

WE OBVIOUSLY COULDN'T FACE THEM IN OUR TRUE FORMS. WE WERE TOO DIFFERENT. WE DIDN'T WANT TO SCARE THEM. WE WANTED TO BE WELCOMED.

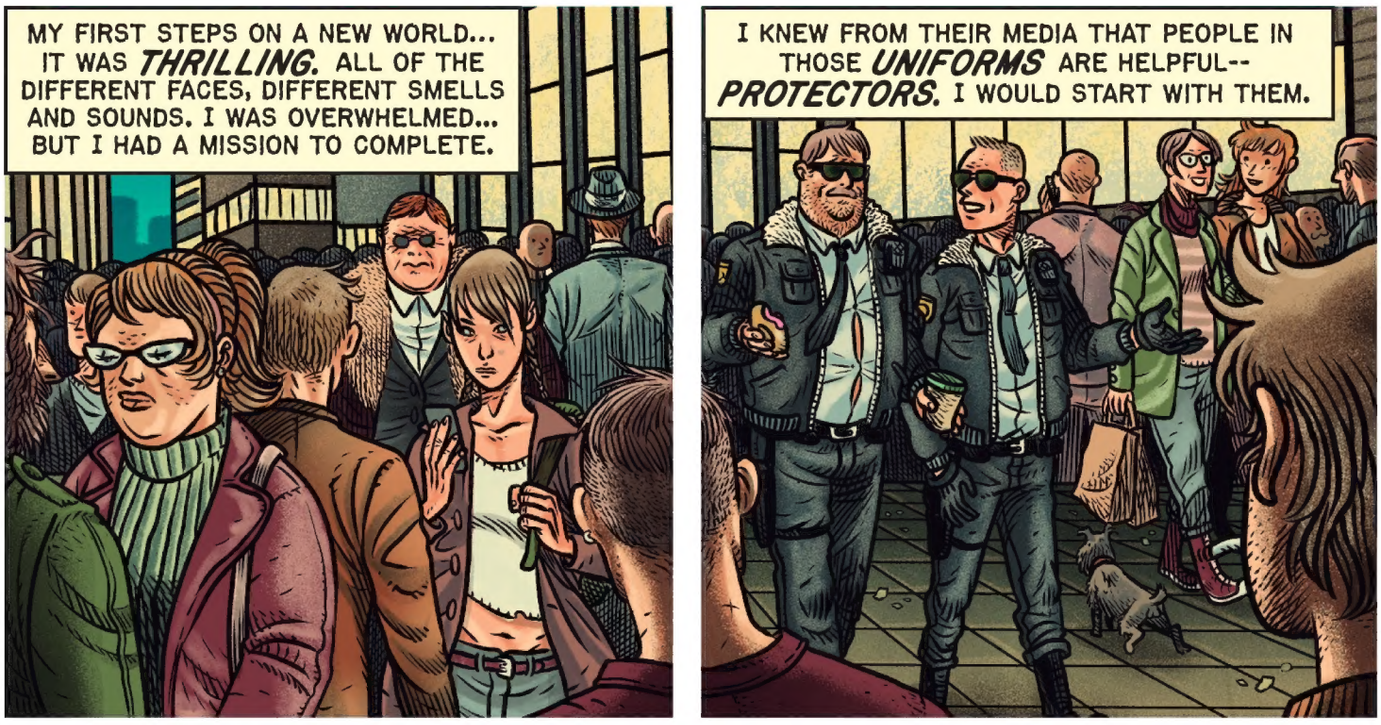

WE HAD MUCH TO OFFER THEM. CURES FOR DISEASES, CLEAN ENERGY, WAYS TO FEED AND HOUSE EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM, THE SOLUTIONS TO SO MANY OF THE PROBLEMS THAT SEEM TO PLAGUE THEM. WE'D BE HAPPY TO SHARE WHATEVER WE HAVE...

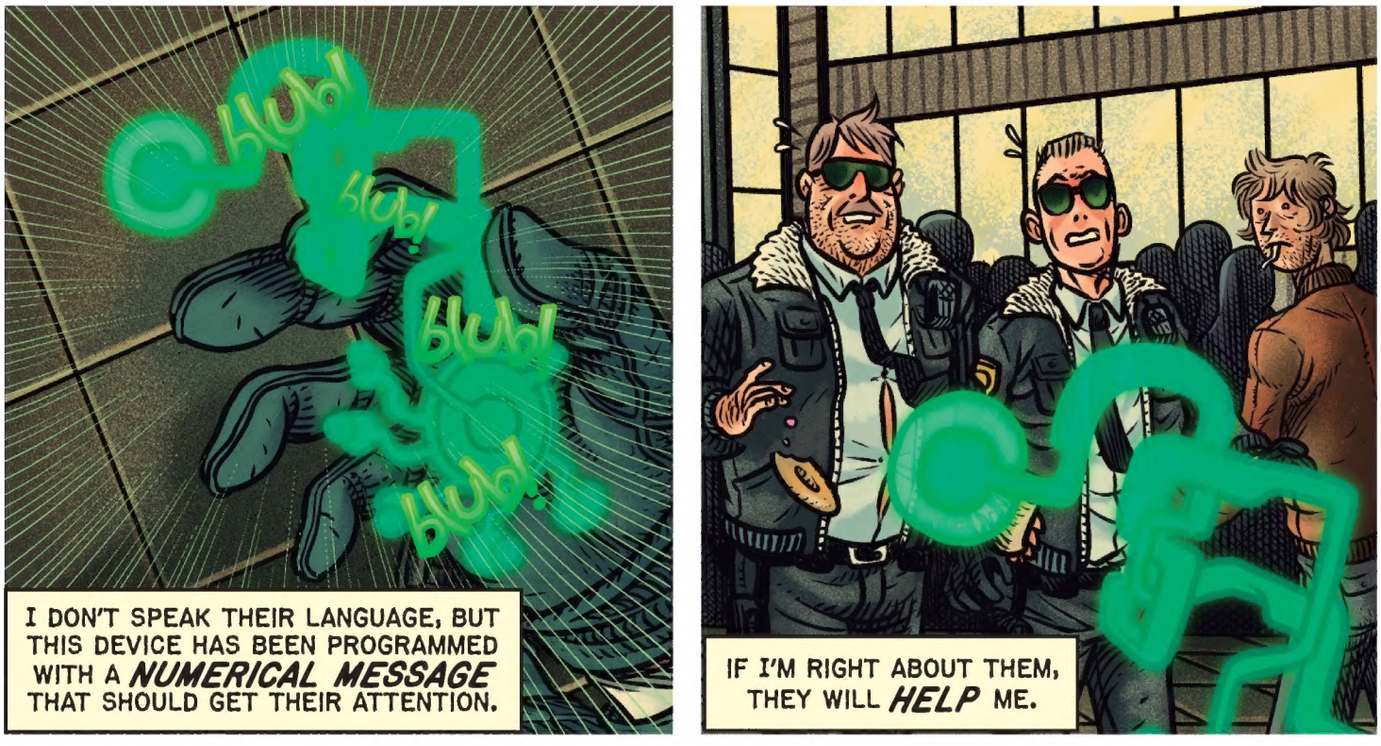

...BUT WE NEEDED A WAY TO MAKE CONTACT SAFELY, TO INTRODUCE OURSELVES TO THEM WITHOUT CONFUSING OR EVEN FRIGHTENING THEM. FINALLY, I DEVELOPED A SOLUTION...


A WAY FOR ME TO WALK AMONG THEM UNNOTICED. SO I COULD MAKE CONTACT, APPROACH THEM WITH PEACE AND HOPE, AND BEGIN THE PROCESS OF JOINING THEIR WORLD.


IT WAS PAINFUL, BUT IT WOULD BE WORTH IT.
FFFZZZZKKKKKZZZZZKK
I MADE MYSELF LOOK LIKE THEM. JUST LIKE ONE OF THEM. WE SCANNED THE WHOLE PLANET AND SELECTED A FACE WE FELT WOULD BE AVERAGE, LIKE MOST OF THEM.
WE FELT WE'D GOTTEN TO KNOW THE PEOPLE OF THIS WORLD JUST FROM OBSERVING THEIR STORIES.
IT WAS LIKE THEY WERE JUST WAITING FOR US TO COME. WAITING TO WELCOME US WITH OPEN ARMS.

I LEFT TO BE OUR AMBASSADOR, TO MAKE CONTACT WITH THEM AND BEGIN THE WORK OF JOINING THIS WORLD.
WE CHOSE A MAJOR POPULATION CENTER, BUT I TELEPORTED TO A SECLUDED SPOT. I DIDN'T WANT TO PANIC ANYONE BY APPEARING SUDDENLY. WE WANTED THIS TO GO SMOOTHLY.
WORLD BANK
FFLASSHHHH--


MY FIRST STEPS ON A NEW WORLD... IT WAS THRILLING. ALL OF THE DIFFERENT FACES, DIFFERENT SMELLS AND SOUNDS. I WAS OVERWHELMED... BUT I HAD A MISSION TO COMPLETE.
I KNEW FROM THEIR MEDIA THAT PEOPLE IN THOSE UNIFORMS ARE HELPFUL-- PROTECTORS. I WOULD START WITH THEM.


blubl
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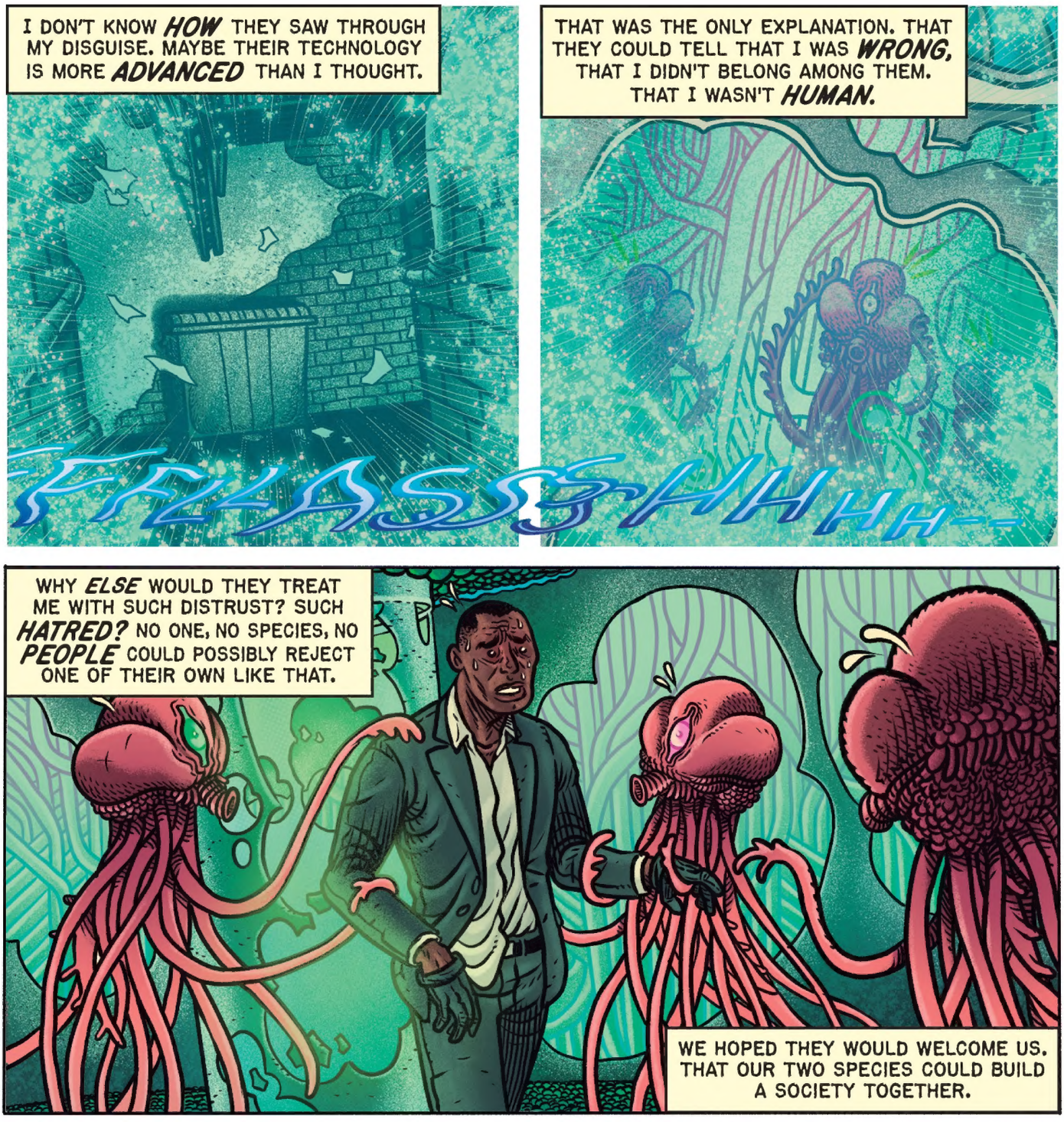
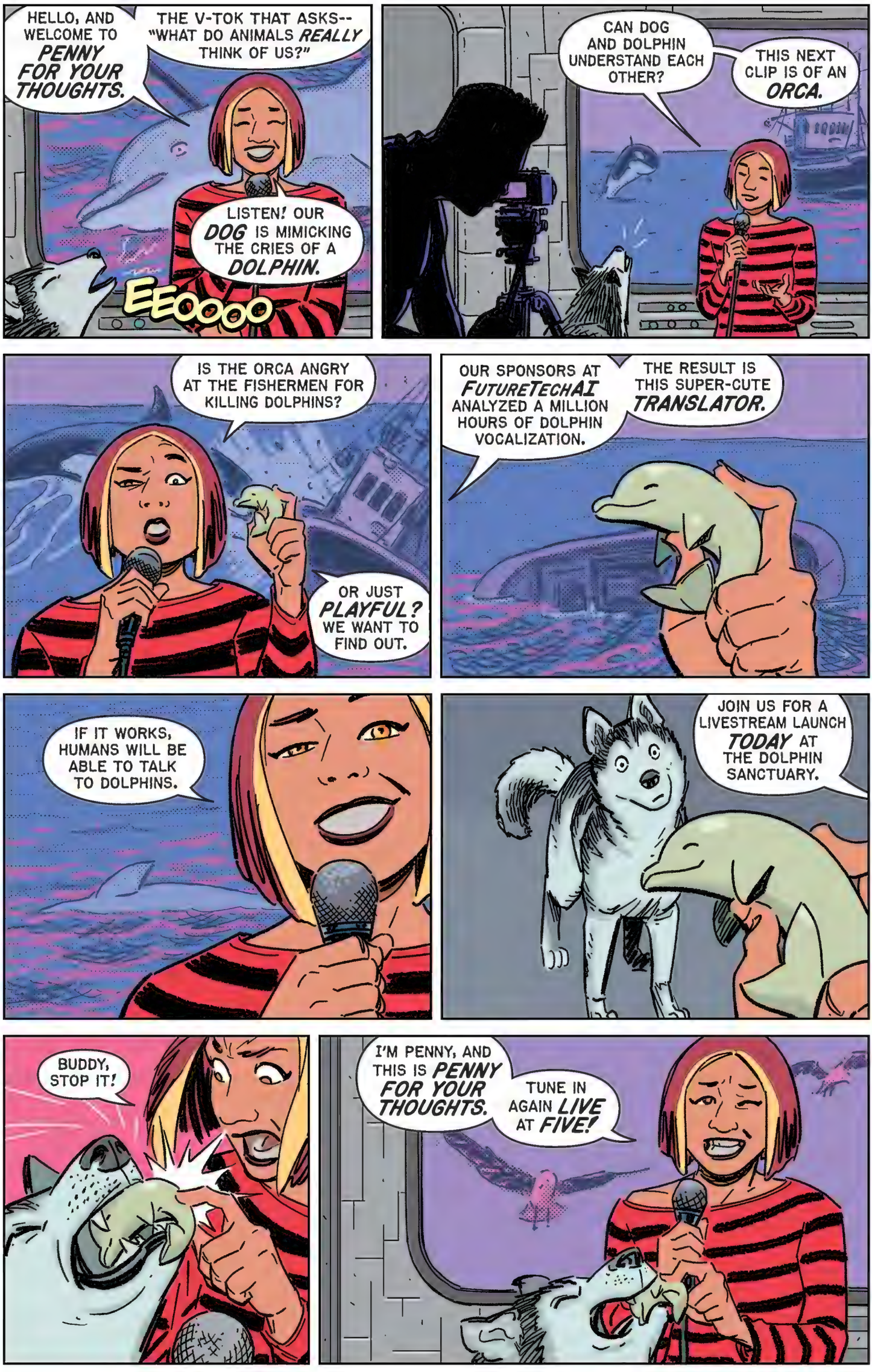
I DON'T SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE, BUT THIS DEVICE HAS BEEN PROGRAMMED WITH A NUMERICAL MESSAGE THAT SHOULD GET THEIR ATTENTION.
IF I'M RIGHT ABOUT THEM, THEY WILL HELP ME.

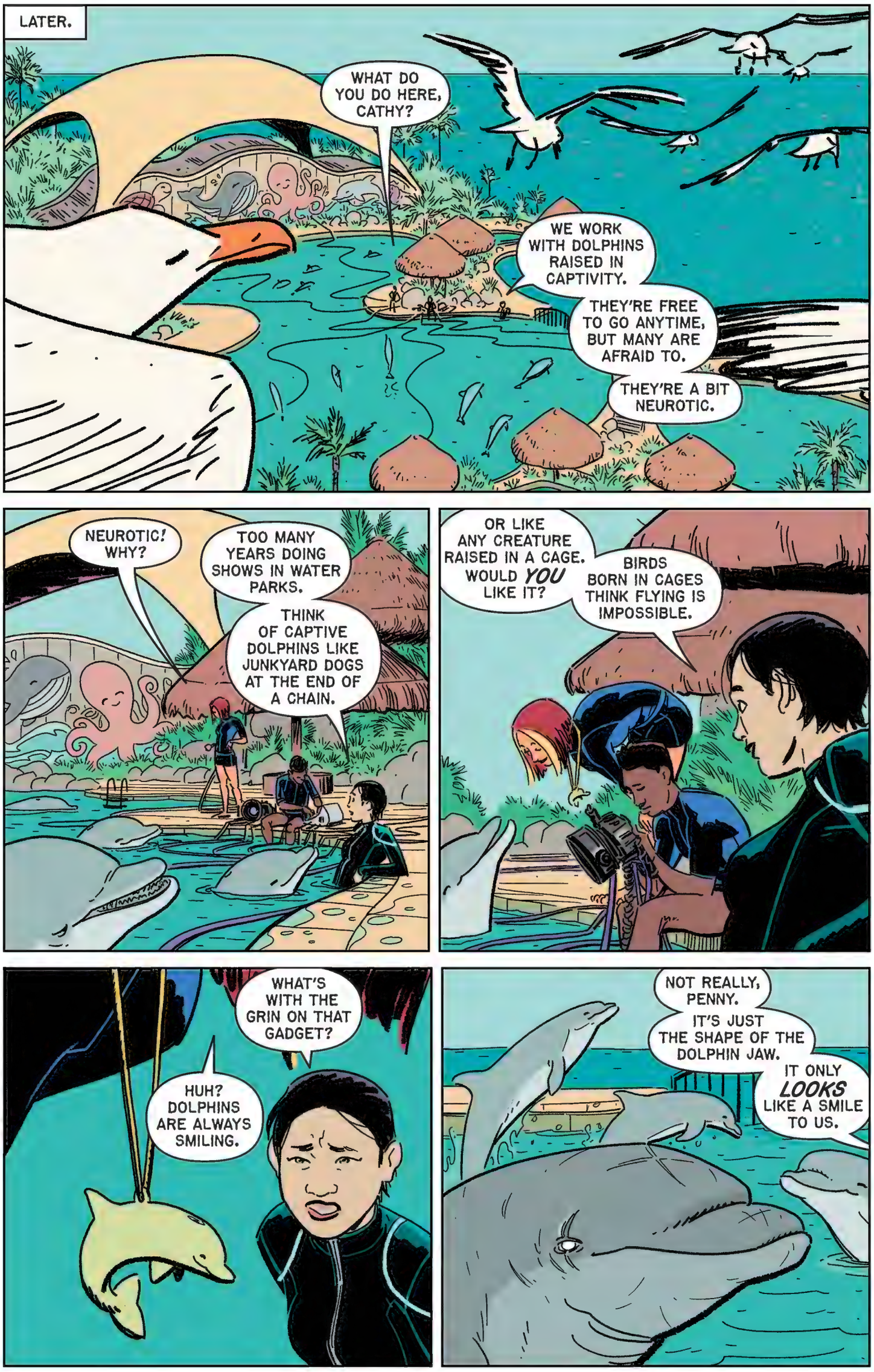
WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?
YOU GOT A PROBLEM?
BUT I WAS WRONG. VERY WRONG.
JUST KEEP IT MOVING, OKAY? NO LOITERING HERE.
I COULD FEEL THE HOSTILITY COMING OFF THEM. THE DISGUST. THE ANGER AT MY VERY EXISTENCE.
I THEN REALIZED THAT I COULD FEEL THAT SAME HOSTILITY EVERYWHERE, FROM NEARLY EVERYONE AROUND ME.
BLUB!
BLUB!
BLUB!
I THOUGHT MY DISGUISE WAS PERFECT. I THOUGHT THAT THEY COULDN'T SEE MY TRUE FACE. BUT CLEARLY, THEY COULD. THEY MUST HAVE...
...AND THOUGHT I WAS A DISGUSTING, HORRID MONSTER. THEY KNEW I WASN'T ONE OF THEM. AND THEY DID NOT WANT ME HERE. NOT AT ALL.

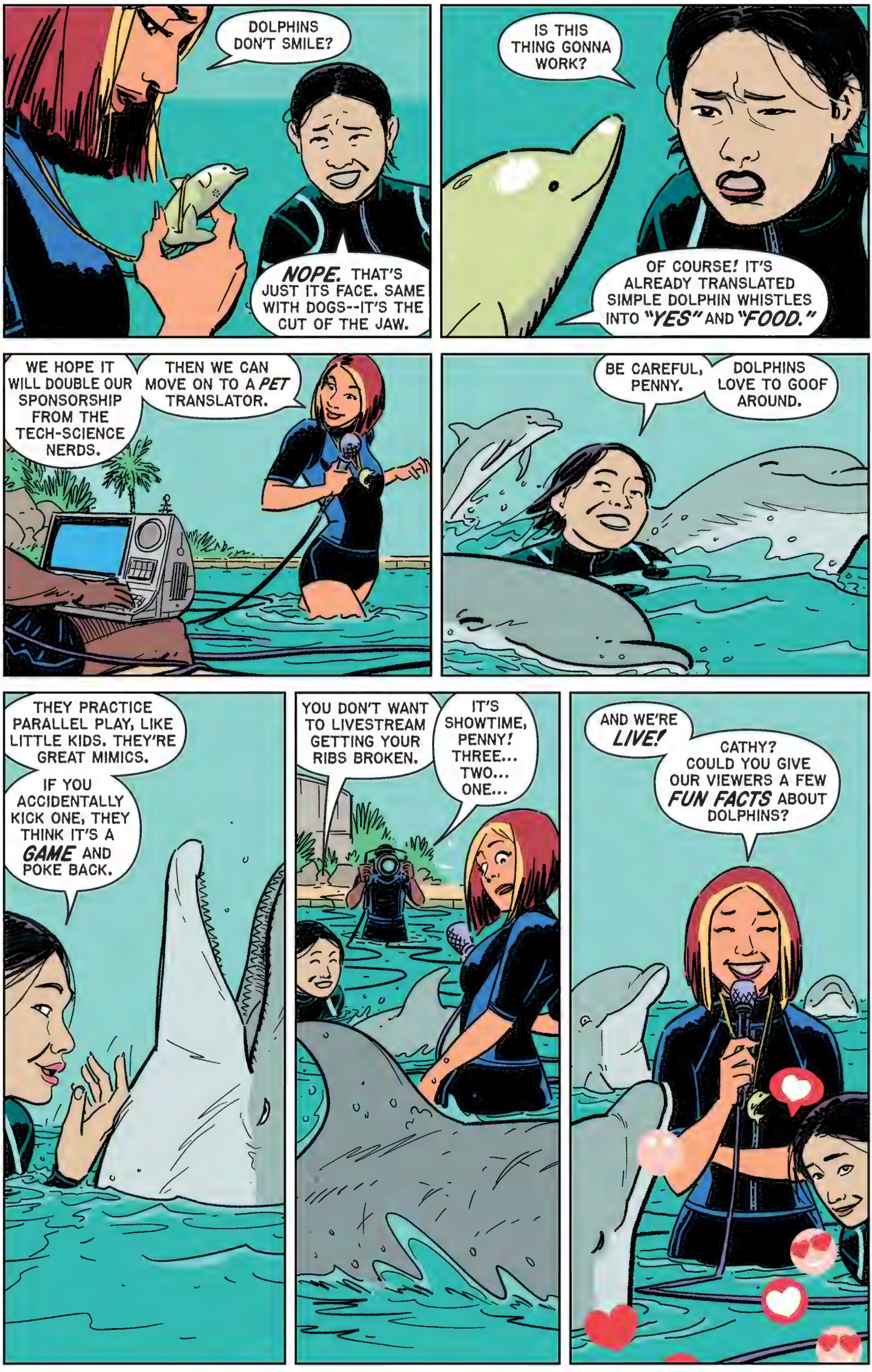

I DON'T KNOW HOW THEY SAW THROUGH MY DISGUISE. MAYBE THEIR TECHNOLOGY IS MORE ADVANCED THAN I THOUGHT.
THAT WAS THE ONLY EXPLANATION. THAT THEY COULD TELL THAT I WAS WRONG, THAT I DIDN'T BELONG AMONG THEM. THAT I WASN'T HUMAN.
FFZASSSHHHH--
WHY ELSE WOULD THEY TREAT ME WITH SUCH DISTRUST? SUCH HATRED? NO ONE, NO SPECIES, NO PEOPLE COULD POSSIBLY REJECT ONE OF THEIR OWN LIKE THAT.
WE HOPED THEY WOULD WELCOME US. THAT OUR TWO SPECIES COULD BUILD A SOCIETY TOGETHER.
IT WASN'T MEANT TO BE. WE MUST PUSH ON.
SOMEWHERE OUT THERE, THERE WILL BE A HOME FOR US. A PLACE FOR US. SOMEWHERE.
THE END

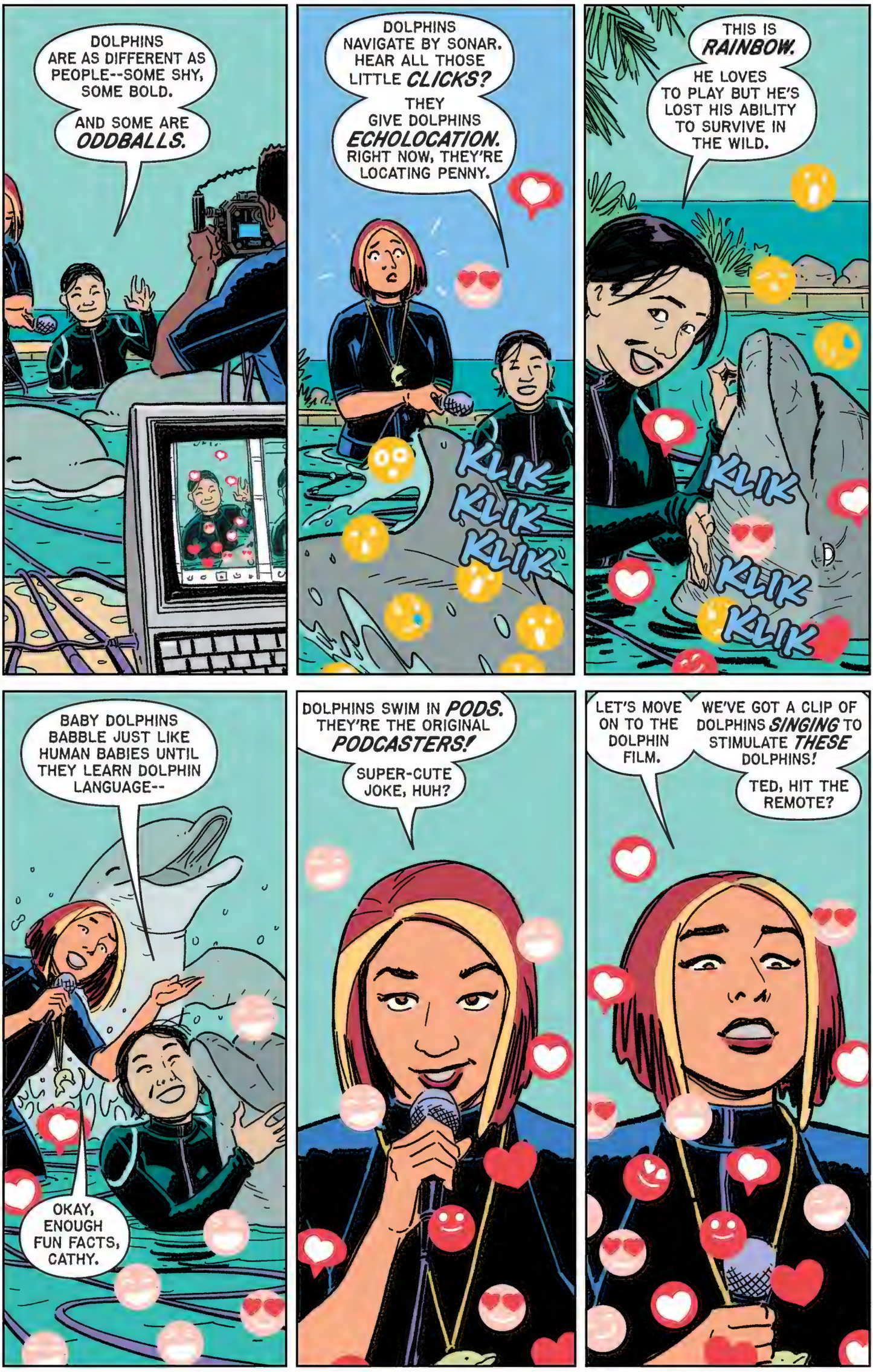
OKAY, BUDDY. ONE BITE.
TED, PLEASE DON'T FEED HIM FROM THE TABLE.
OUCH!
SEE? DOGS NEED TOTAL DISCIPLINE OR THEY REVERT.
REVERT TO WHAT?
THEIR FERAL NATURE. DOGS ARE DESCENDED FROM WOLVES.
IF BUDDY GOT HUNGRY ENOUGH, HE'D EAT YOU.
BUDDY, WOULD YOU EAT ME?
RRUP!
IS THAT A YUP?
SLURP
WHAT'S BUDDY REALLY SAYING?
WHEN OUR MONTHS OF DEVELOPING OUR ANIMAL TRANSLATOR PAY OFF--
EEEOO
EEOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO
--WE'LL FINALLY KNOW.
PENNY, I CAN SPEAK DOG.
BUDDY SAYS, "PET ME, FEED ME, PLAY WITH ME" OVER AND OVER FOR ALL ETERNITY.

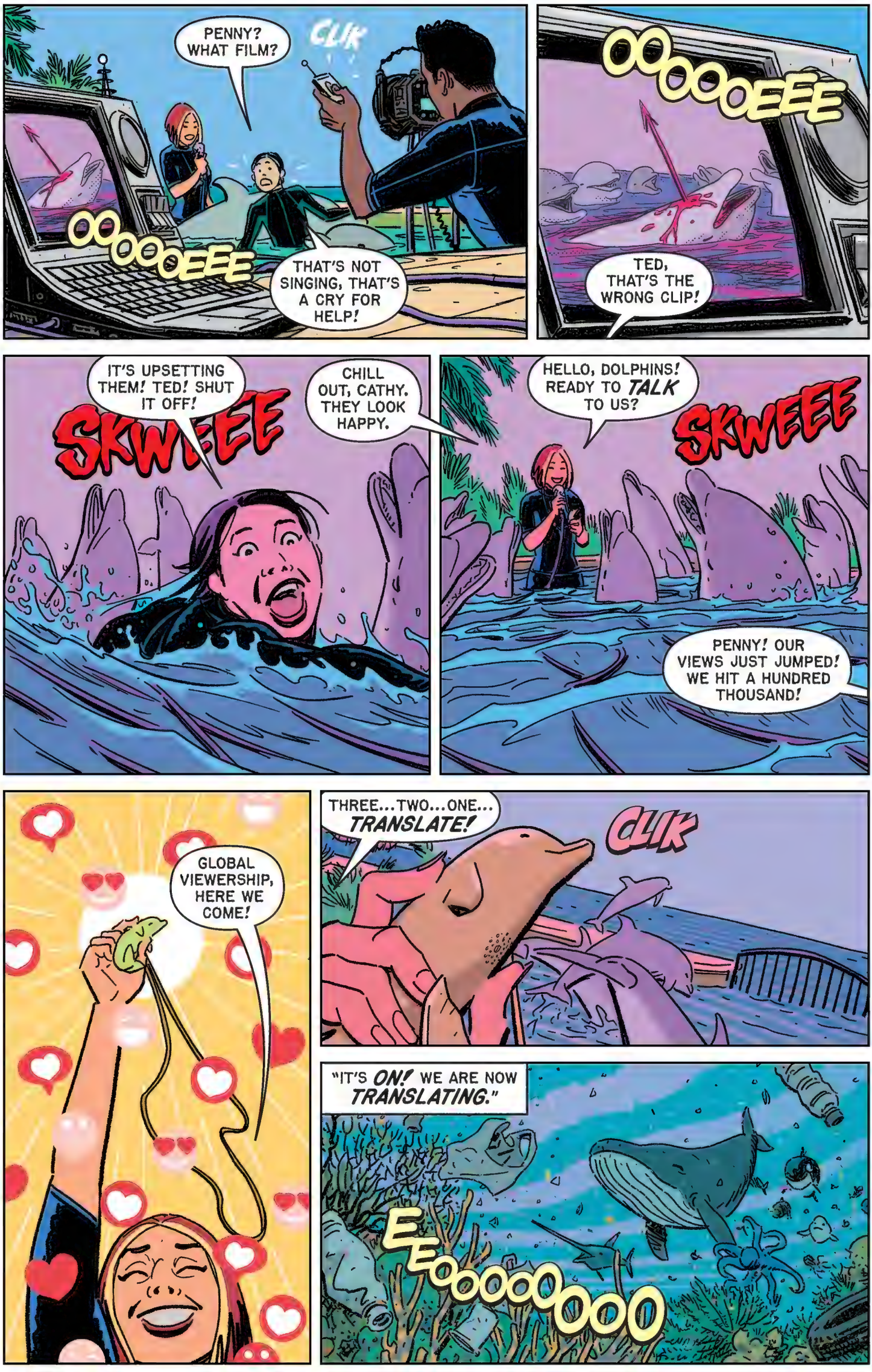
CATCH & KILL
EEOOO

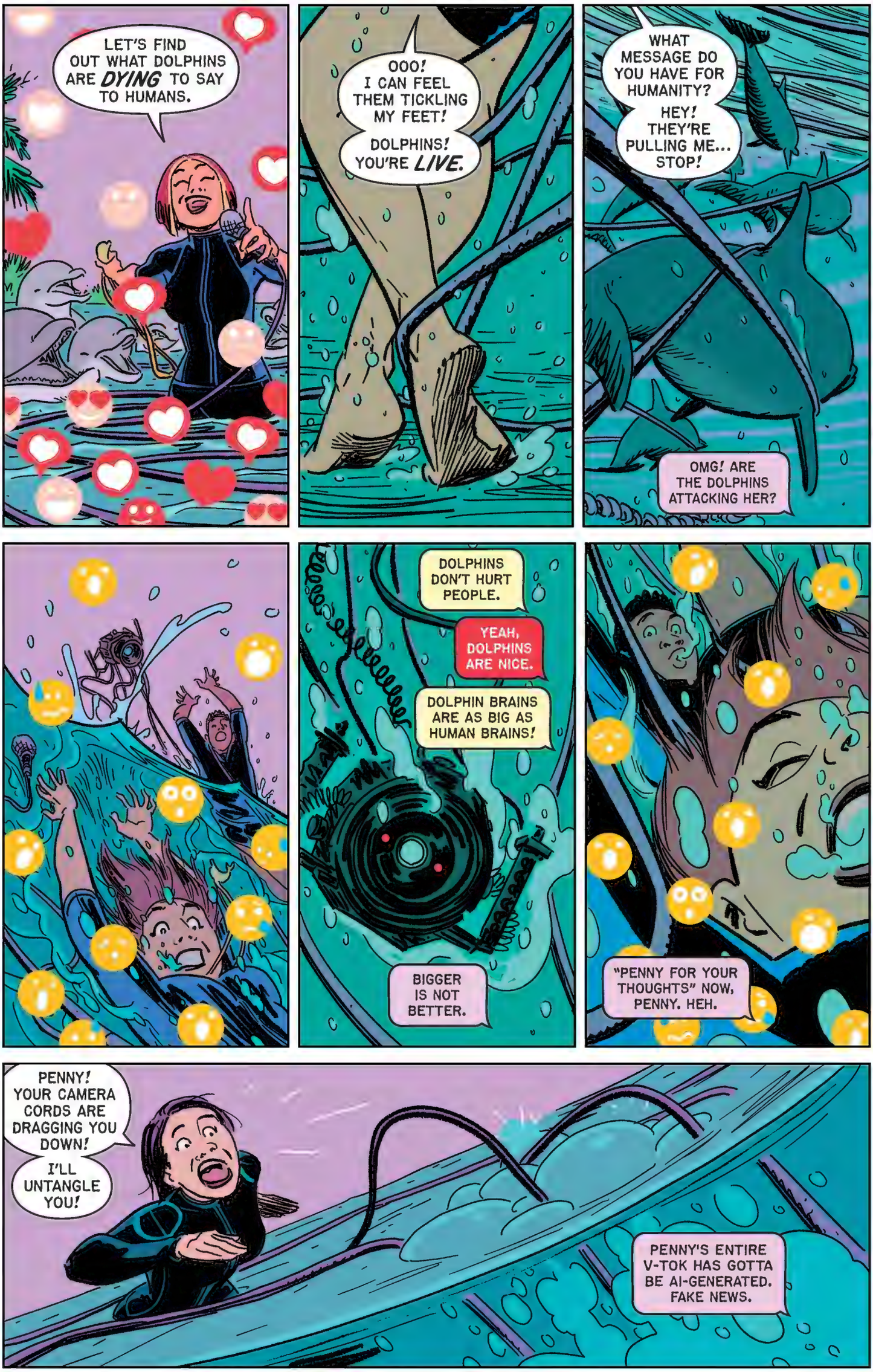

HELLO, AND WELCOME TO PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS.
THE V-TOK THAT ASKS-- "WHAT DO ANIMALS REALLY THINK OF US?"
LISTEN! OUR DOG IS MIMICKING THE CRIES OF A DOLPHIN.
EEOOOO
CAN DOG AND DOLPHIN UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER?
THIS NEXT CLIP IS OF AN ORCA.
IS THE ORCA ANGRY AT THE FISHERMEN FOR KILLING DOLPHINS?
OR JUST PLAYFUL? WE WANT TO FIND OUT.
OUR SPONSORS AT FUTURETECHAI ANALYZED A MILLION HOURS OF DOLPHIN VOCALIZATION.
THE RESULT IS THIS SUPER-CUTE TRANSLATOR.
IF IT WORKS, HUMANS WILL BE ABLE TO TALK TO DOLPHINS.
JOIN US FOR A LIVESTREAM LAUNCH TODAY AT THE DOLPHIN SANCTUARY.
BUDDY, STOP IT!
I'M PENNY, AND THIS IS PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS.
TUNE IN AGAIN LIVE AT FIVE!

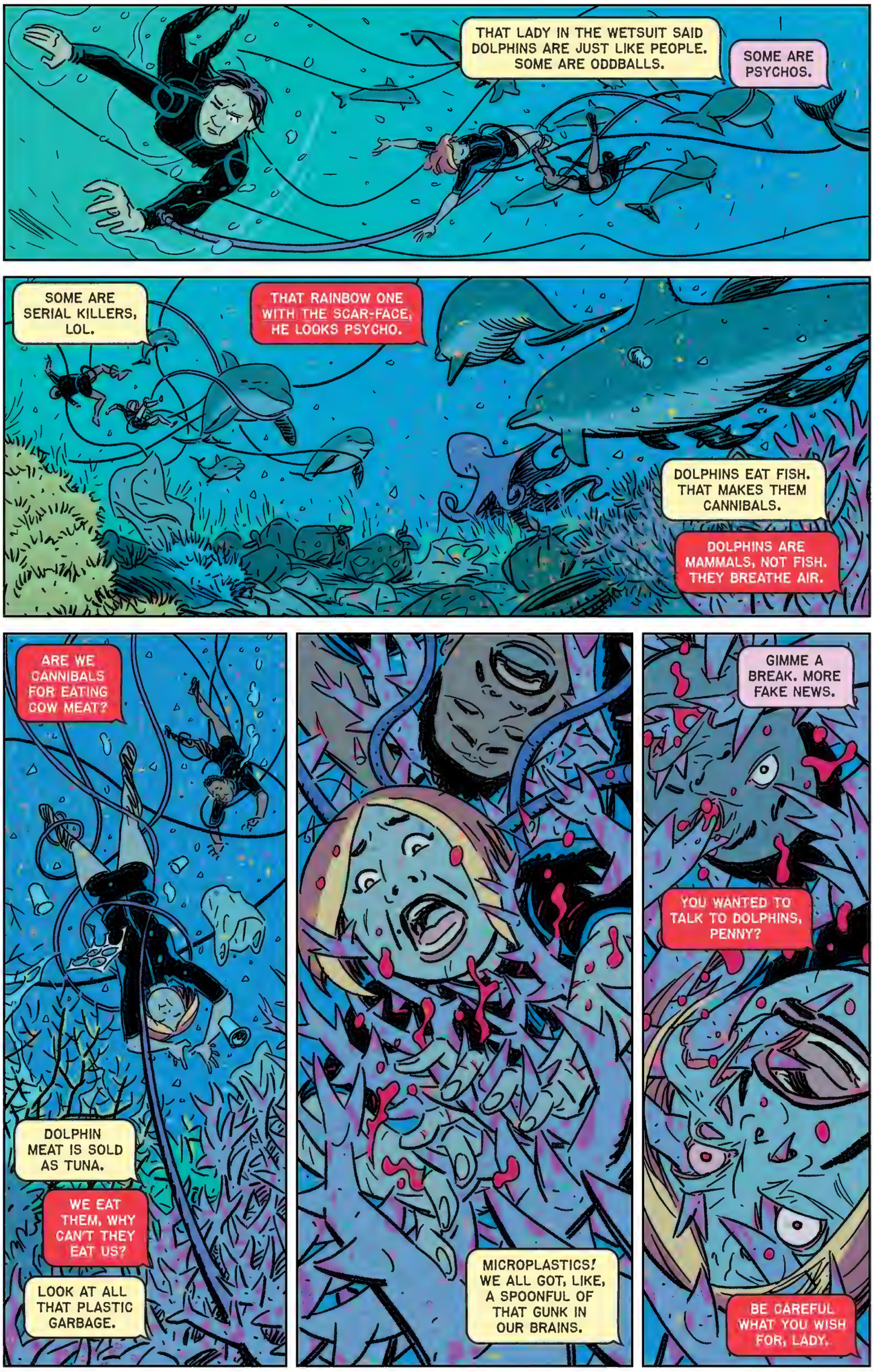

LATER.
WHAT DO YOU DO HERE, CATHY?
WE WORK WITH DOLPHINS RAISED IN CAPTIVITY.
THEY'RE FREE TO GO ANYTIME, BUT MANY ARE AFRAID TO.
THEY'RE A BIT NEUROTIC.
NEUROTIC! WHY?
TOO MANY YEARS DOING SHOWS IN WATER PARKS.
THINK OF CAPTIVE DOLPHINS LIKE JUNKYARD DOGS AT THE END OF A CHAIN.
OR LIKE ANY CREATURE RAISED IN A CAGE. WOULD YOU LIKE IT?
BIRDS BORN IN CAGES THINK FLYING IS IMPOSSIBLE.
WHAT'S WITH THE GRIN ON THAT GADGET?
HUH? DOLPHINS ARE ALWAYS SMILING.
NOT REALLY, PENNY.
IT'S JUST THE SHAPE OF THE DOLPHIN JAW.
IT ONLY LOOKS LIKE A SMILE TO US.

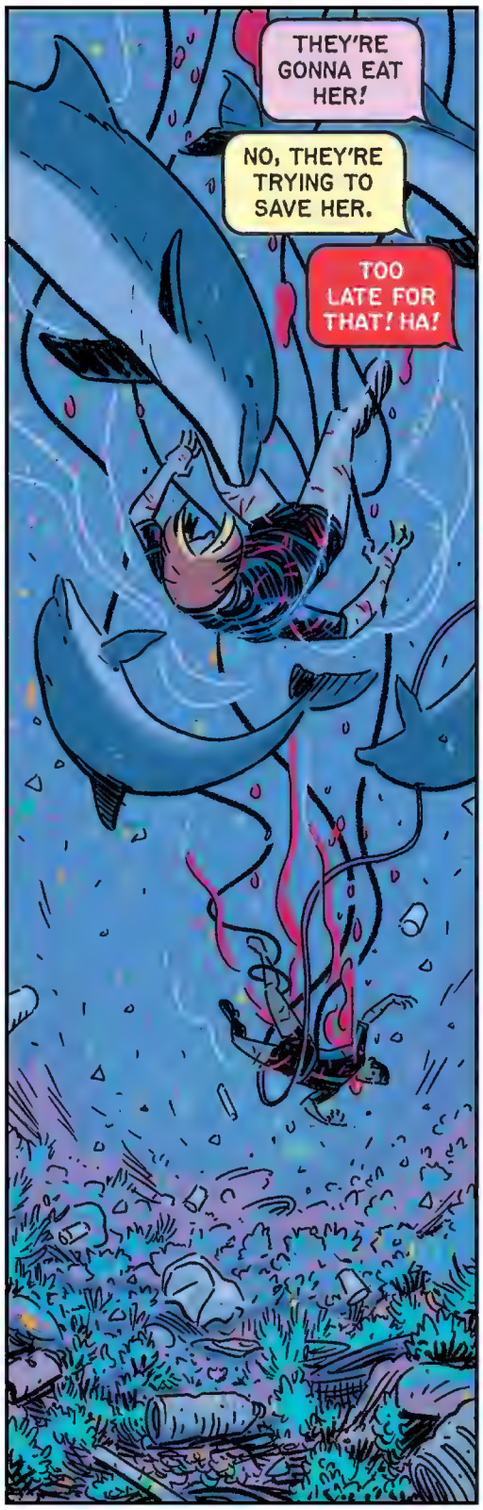

DOLPHINS DON'T SMILE?
NOPE. THAT'S JUST ITS FACE. SAME WITH DOGS--IT'S THE CUT OF THE JAW.
IS THIS THING GONNA WORK?
OF COURSE! IT'S ALREADY TRANSLATED SIMPLE DOLPHIN WHISTLES INTO "YES" AND "FOOD."
WE HOPE IT WILL DOUBLE OUR SPONSORSHIP FROM THE TECH-SCIENCE NERDS.
THEN WE CAN MOVE ON TO A PET TRANSLATOR.
BE CAREFUL, PENNY.
DOLPHINS LOVE TO GOOF AROUND.
THEY PRACTICE PARALLEL PLAY, LIKE LITTLE KIDS. THEY'RE GREAT MIMICS.
IF YOU ACCIDENTALLY KICK ONE, THEY THINK IT'S A GAME AND POKE BACK.
YOU DON'T WANT TO LIVESTREAM GETTING YOUR RIBS BROKEN.
IT'S SHOWTIME, PENNY! THREE... TWO... ONE...
AND WE'RE LIVE!
CATHY? COULD YOU GIVE OUR VIEWERS A FEW FUN FACTS ABOUT DOLPHINS?

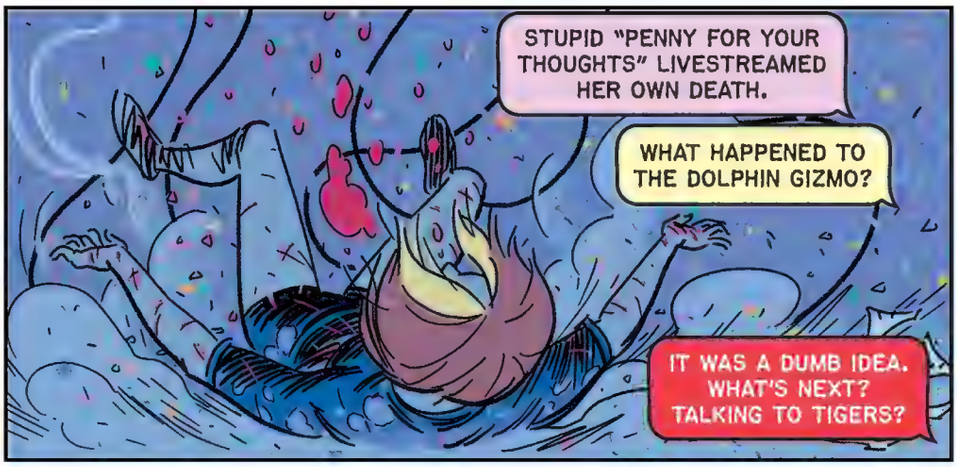

DOLPHINS ARE AS DIFFERENT AS PEOPLE--SOME SHY, SOME BOLD.
AND SOME ARE ODDBALLS.
DOLPHINS NAVIGATE BY SONAR. HEAR ALL THOSE LITTLE CLICKS?
THEY GIVE DOLPHINS ECHOLOCATION. RIGHT NOW, THEY'RE LOCATING PENNY.
KLIK KLIK KLIK
THIS IS RAINBOW.
HE LOVES TO PLAY BUT HE'S LOST HIS ABILITY TO SURVIVE IN THE WILD.
KLIK KLIK KLIK
BABY DOLPHINS BABBLE JUST LIKE HUMAN BABIES UNTIL THEY LEARN DOLPHIN LANGUAGE--
OKAY, ENOUGH FUN FACTS, CATHY.
DOLPHINS SWIM IN PODS. THEY'RE THE ORIGINAL PODCASTERS!
SUPER-CUTE JOKE, HUH?
LET'S MOVE ON TO THE DOLPHIN FILM.
WE'VE GOT A CLIP OF DOLPHINS SINGING TO STIMULATE THESE DOLPHINS!
TED, HIT THE REMOTE?

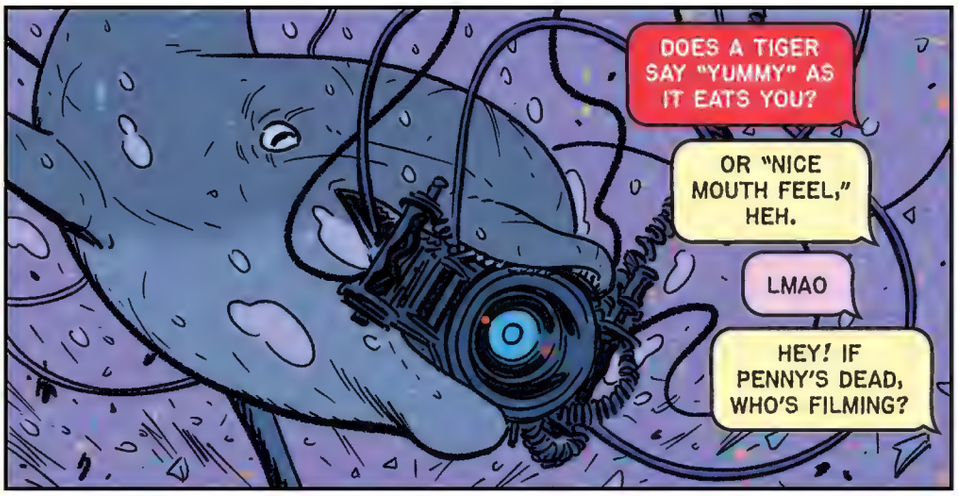

PENNY? WHAT FILM?
CLIK
OOOOEEE
THAT'S NOT SINGING, THAT'S A CRY FOR HELP!
OOOOEEE
TED, THAT'S THE WRONG CLIP!
IT'S UPSETTING THEM! TED! SHUT IT OFF!
SKWEEE
CHILL OUT, CATHY. THEY LOOK HAPPY.
HELLO, DOLPHINS! READY TO TALK TO US?
SKWEEE
PENNY! OUR VIEWS JUST JUMPED! WE HIT A HUNDRED THOUSAND!
GLOBAL VIEWERSHIP, HERE WE COME!
THREE...TWO...ONE... TRANSLATE!
CLIK
"IT'S ON! WE ARE NOW TRANSLATING."
EEOOOOOOO

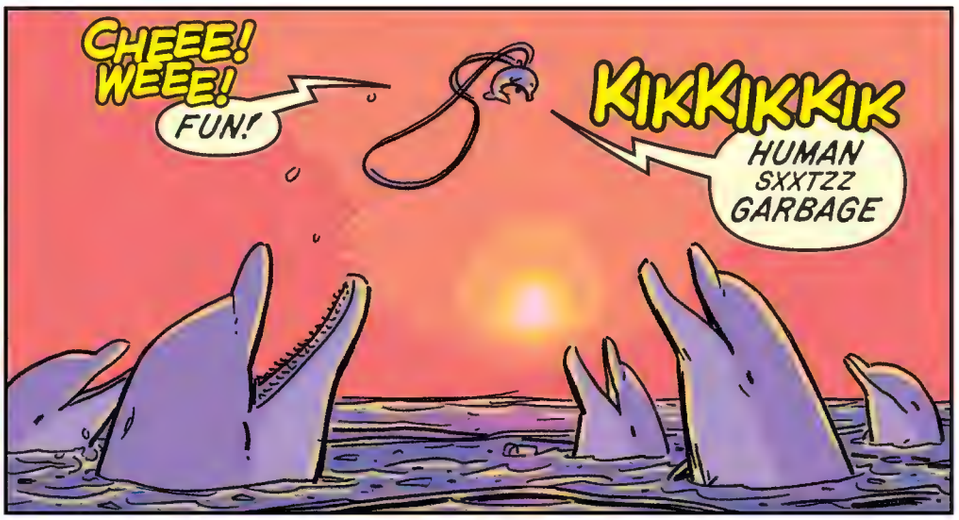

LET'S FIND OUT WHAT DOLPHINS ARE DYING TO SAY TO HUMANS.
OOO! I CAN FEEL THEM TICKLING MY FEET!
DOLPHINS! YOU'RE LIVE.
WHAT MESSAGE DO YOU HAVE FOR HUMANITY?
HEY! THEY'RE PULLING ME... STOP!
OMG! ARE THE DOLPHINS ATTACKING HER?
DOLPHINS DON'T HURT PEOPLE.
YEAH, DOLPHINS ARE NICE.
DOLPHIN BRAINS ARE AS BIG AS HUMAN BRAINS!
BIGGER IS NOT BETTER.
"PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS" NOW, PENNY. HEH.
PENNY! YOUR CAMERA CORDS ARE DRAGGING YOU DOWN!
I'LL UNTANGLE YOU!
PENNY'S ENTIRE V-TOK HAS GOTTA BE AI-GENERATED. FAKE NEWS.

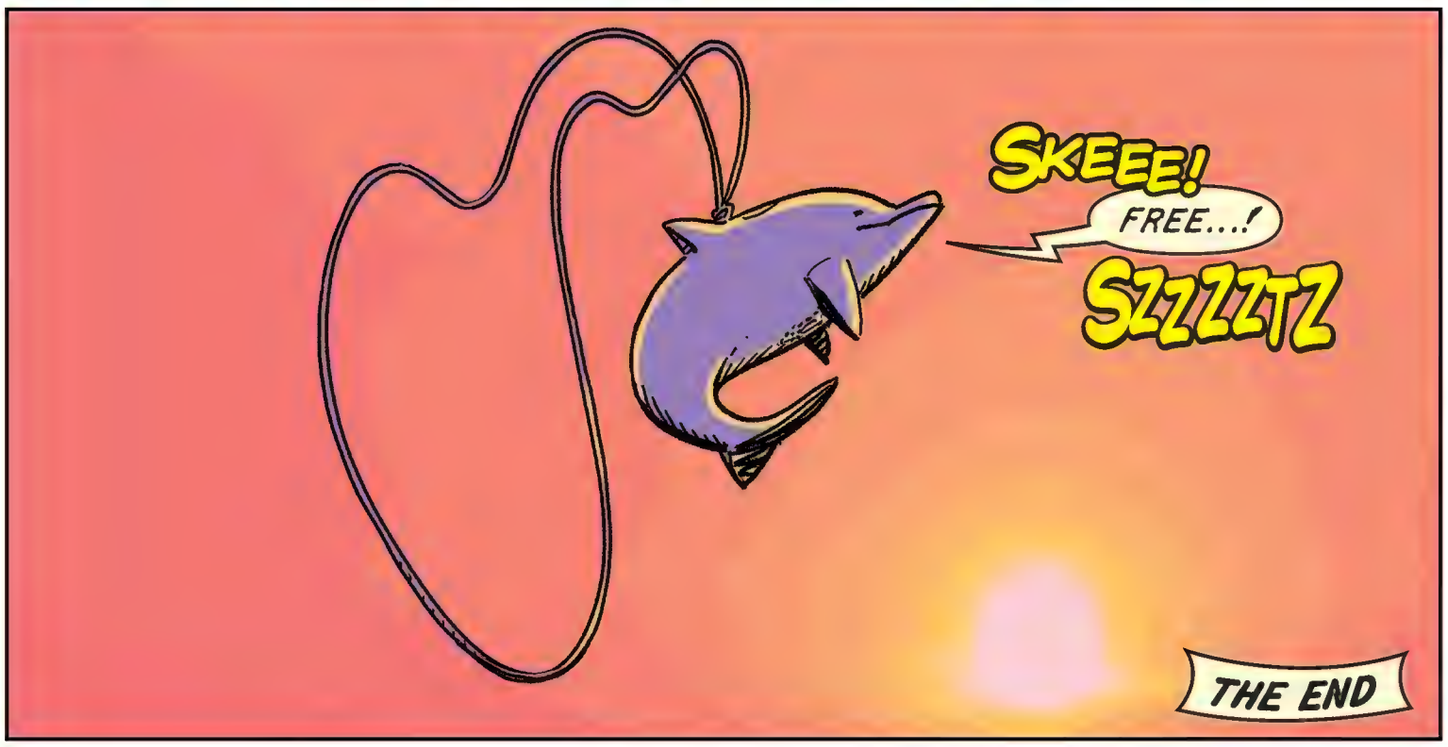

THAT LADY IN THE WETSUIT SAID DOLPHINS ARE JUST LIKE PEOPLE. SOME ARE ODDBALLS.
SOME ARE PSYCHOS.
SOME ARE SERIAL KILLERS, LOL.
THAT RAINBOW ONE WITH THE SCAR-FACE, HE LOOKS PSYCHO.
DOLPHINS EAT FISH. THAT MAKES THEM CANNIBALS.
DOLPHINS ARE MAMMALS, NOT FISH. THEY BREATHE AIR.
ARE WE CANNIBALS FOR EATING COW MEAT?
DOLPHIN MEAT IS SOLD AS TUNA.
WE EAT THEM, WHY CAN'T THEY EAT US?
LOOK AT ALL THAT PLASTIC GARBAGE.
MICROPLASTICS! WE ALL GOT, LIKE, A SPOONFUL OF THAT GUNK IN OUR BRAINS.
GIMME A BREAK. MORE FAKE NEWS.
YOU WANTED TO TALK TO DOLPHINS, PENNY?
BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR, LADY.

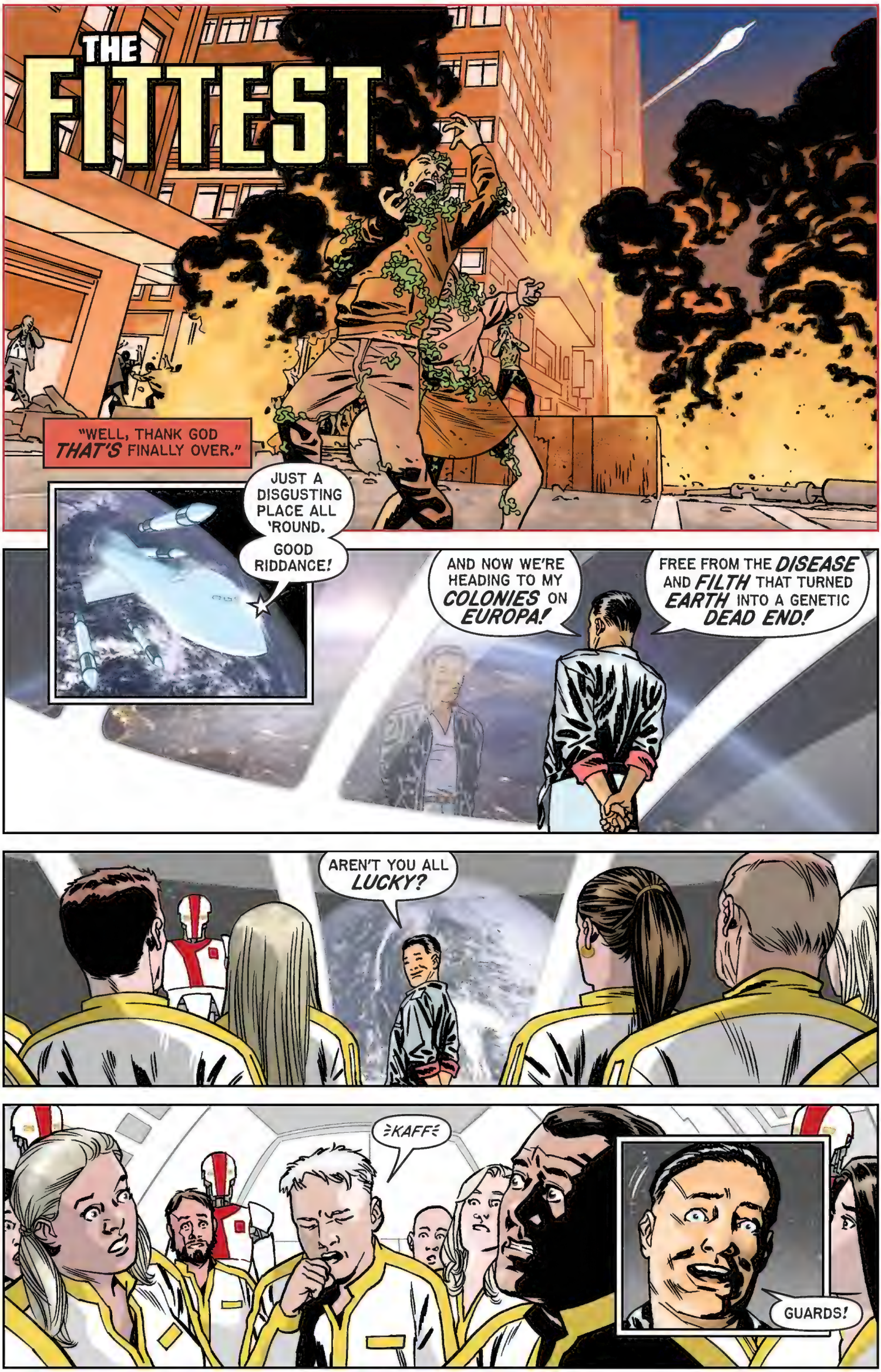

THEY'RE GONNA EAT HER!
NO, THEY'RE TRYING TO SAVE HER.
TOO LATE FOR THAT! HA!

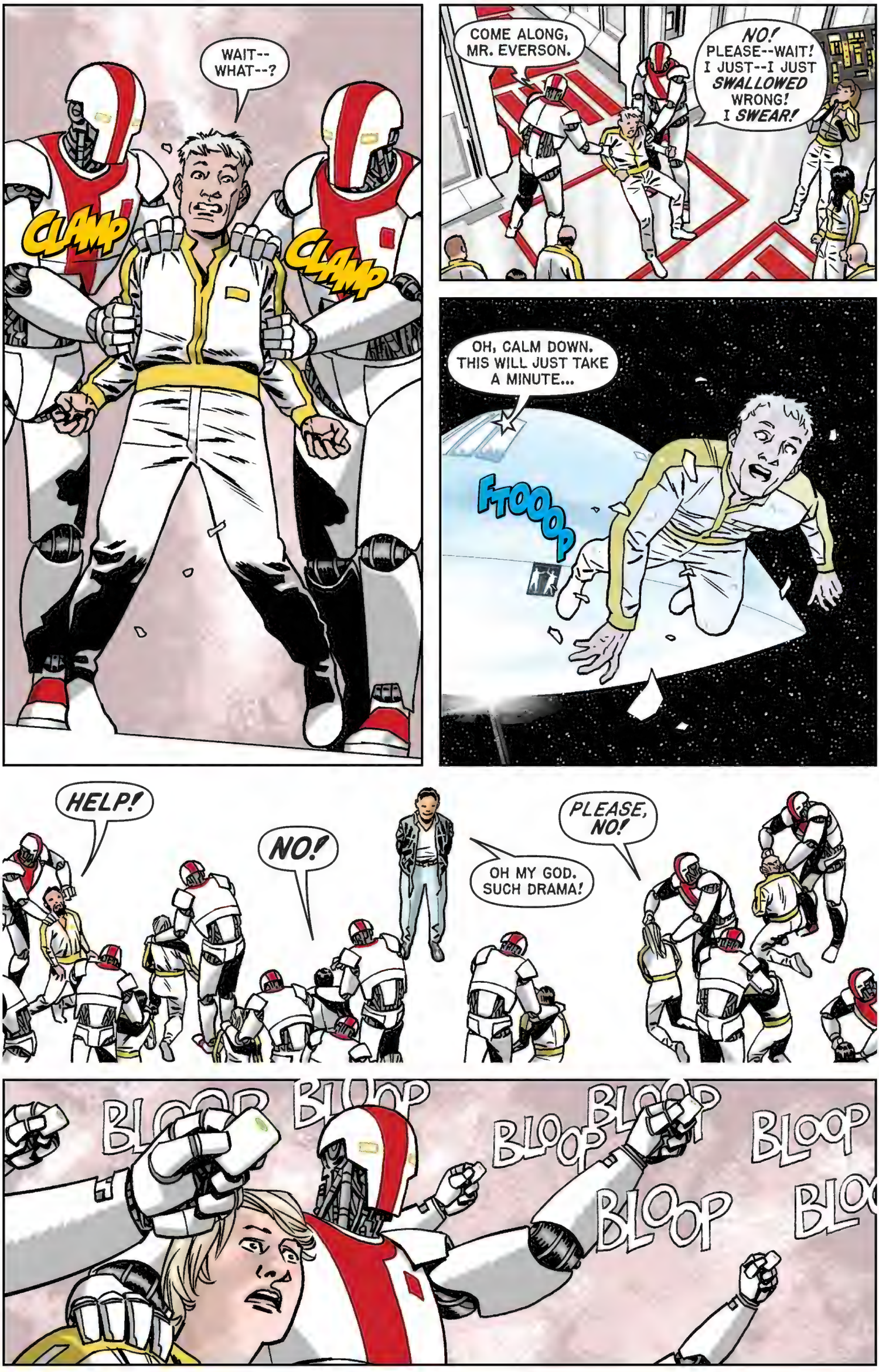

STUPID "PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS" LIVESTREAMED HER OWN DEATH.
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE DOLPHIN GIZMO?
IT WAS A DUMB IDEA. WHAT'S NEXT? TALKING TO TIGERS?


DOES A TIGER SAY "YUMMY" AS IT EATS YOU?
OR "NICE MOUTH FEEL," HEH.
LMAO
HEY! IF PENNY'S DEAD, WHO'S FILMING?


CHEEE! WEEE!
FUN!
KIKKIKKIK
HUMAN SXXTZZ GARBAGE

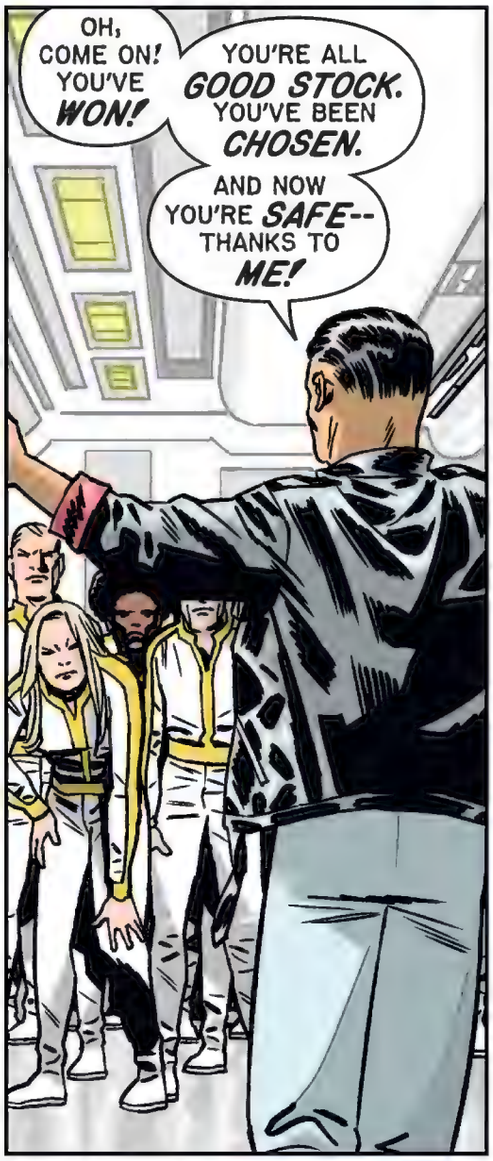

SKEEE!
FREE...!
SZZZZTZ
THE END

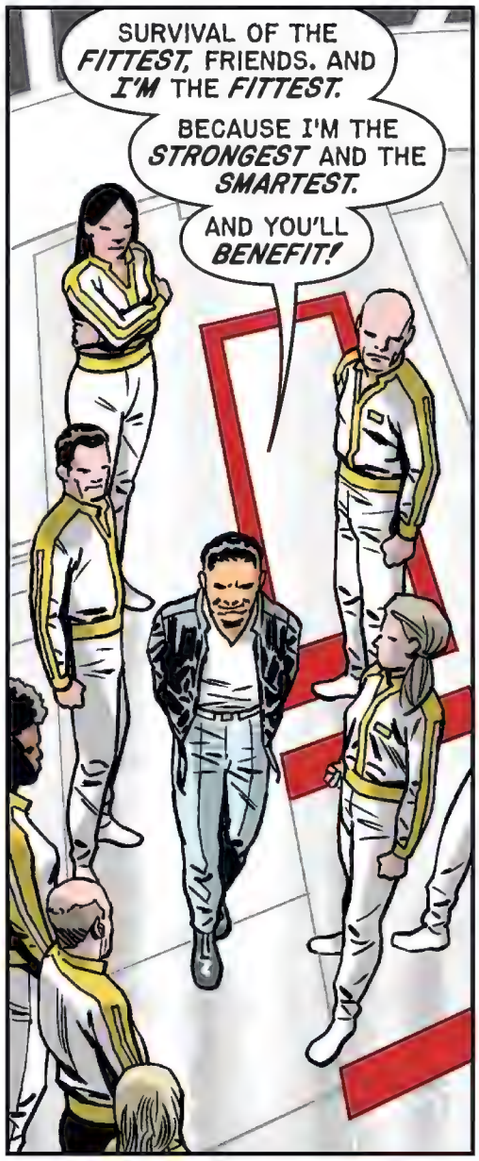

THE FITTEST
"WELL, THANK GOD THAT'S FINALLY OVER."
JUST A DISGUSTING PLACE ALL 'ROUND.
GOOD RIDDANCE!
AND NOW WE'RE HEADING TO MY COLONIES ON EUROPA!
FREE FROM THE DISEASE AND FILTH THAT TURNED EARTH INTO A GENETIC DEAD END!
AREN'T YOU ALL LUCKY?
=KAFF=
GUARDS!

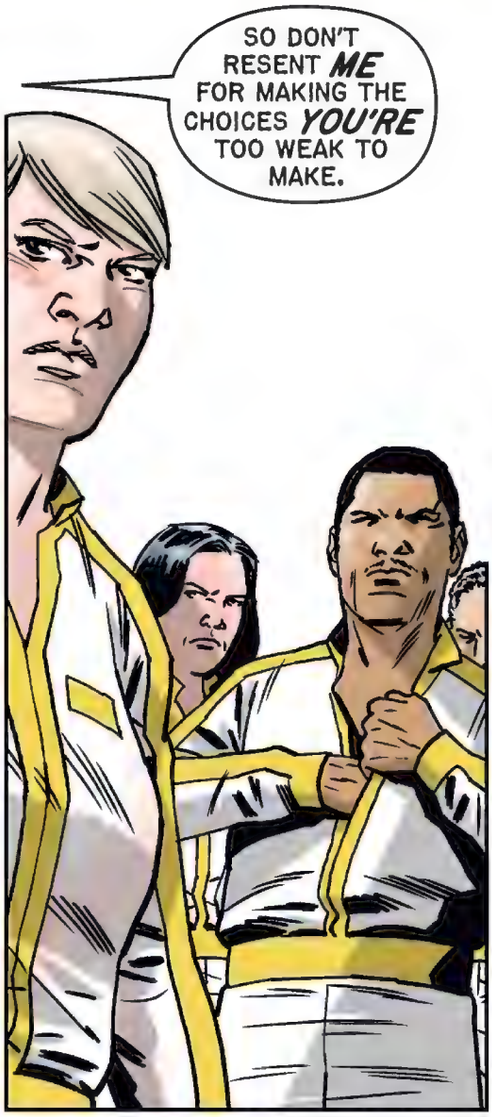

WAIT--
WHAT--?
CLAMP
CLAMP
COME ALONG, MR. EVERSON.
NO! PLEASE--WAIT! I JUST--I JUST SWALLOWED WRONG! I SWEAR!
OH, CALM DOWN. THIS WILL JUST TAKE A MINUTE...
FTOOOP
HELP!
NO!
OH MY GOD. SUCH DRAMA!
PLEASE, NO!
BLOOP
BLOOP
BLOOP
BLOOP
BLOOP
BLOOP

ALL CLEAR.
ALL CLEAR.
SO... EVERSON?
UNABLE TO TEST DIRECTLY. BUT ALMOST CERTAINLY--

--HE WAS CLEAN.
WELL, BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY.


OH, COME ON! YOU'VE WON!
YOU'RE ALL GOOD STOCK. YOU'VE BEEN CHOSEN.
AND NOW YOU'RE SAFE-- THANKS TO ME!

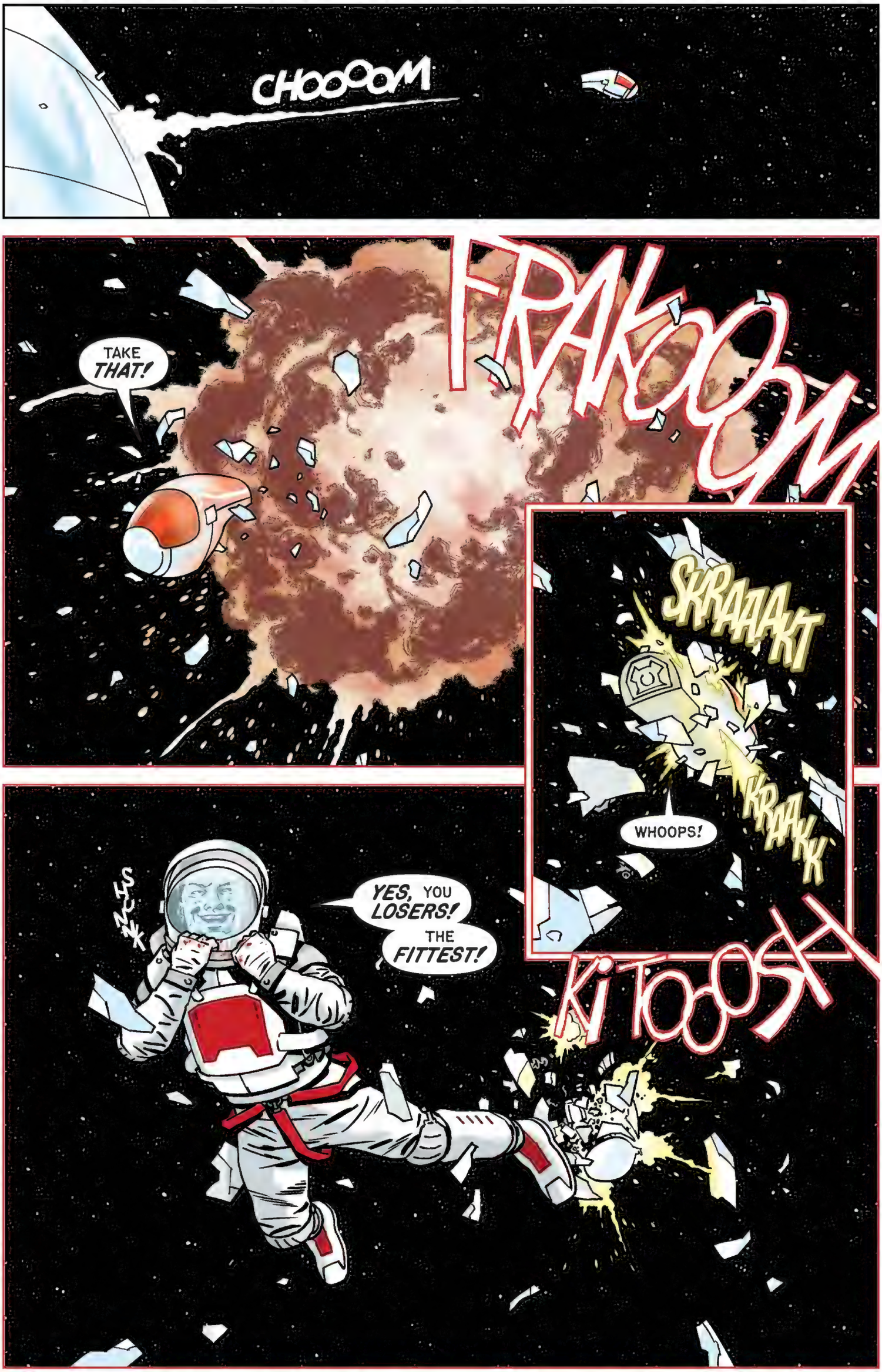

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST, FRIENDS. AND I'M THE FITTEST.
BECAUSE I'M THE STRONGEST AND THE SMARTEST.
AND YOU'LL BENEFIT!


SO DON'T RESENT ME FOR MAKING THE CHOICES YOU'RE TOO WEAK TO MAKE.

GRRAAA!
VNNNN
WHA--?
VNNNN
VNNNN
KRAAAAKK
GAH!
HA HA!
STUPID!
YOU THINK I DIDN'T PREPARE FOR THIS?
YOU CAN'T BEAT--
SKRAAK

KLOOOOOOOOOP
THEY'RE DOWN! GET HIM!
SKLAAAAANG
HUH.
"SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST, FRIENDS."
WELL, I'M GLAD SOMEONE WAS LISTENING.
BRRRRZZAAWWW
AAAAAAGH!

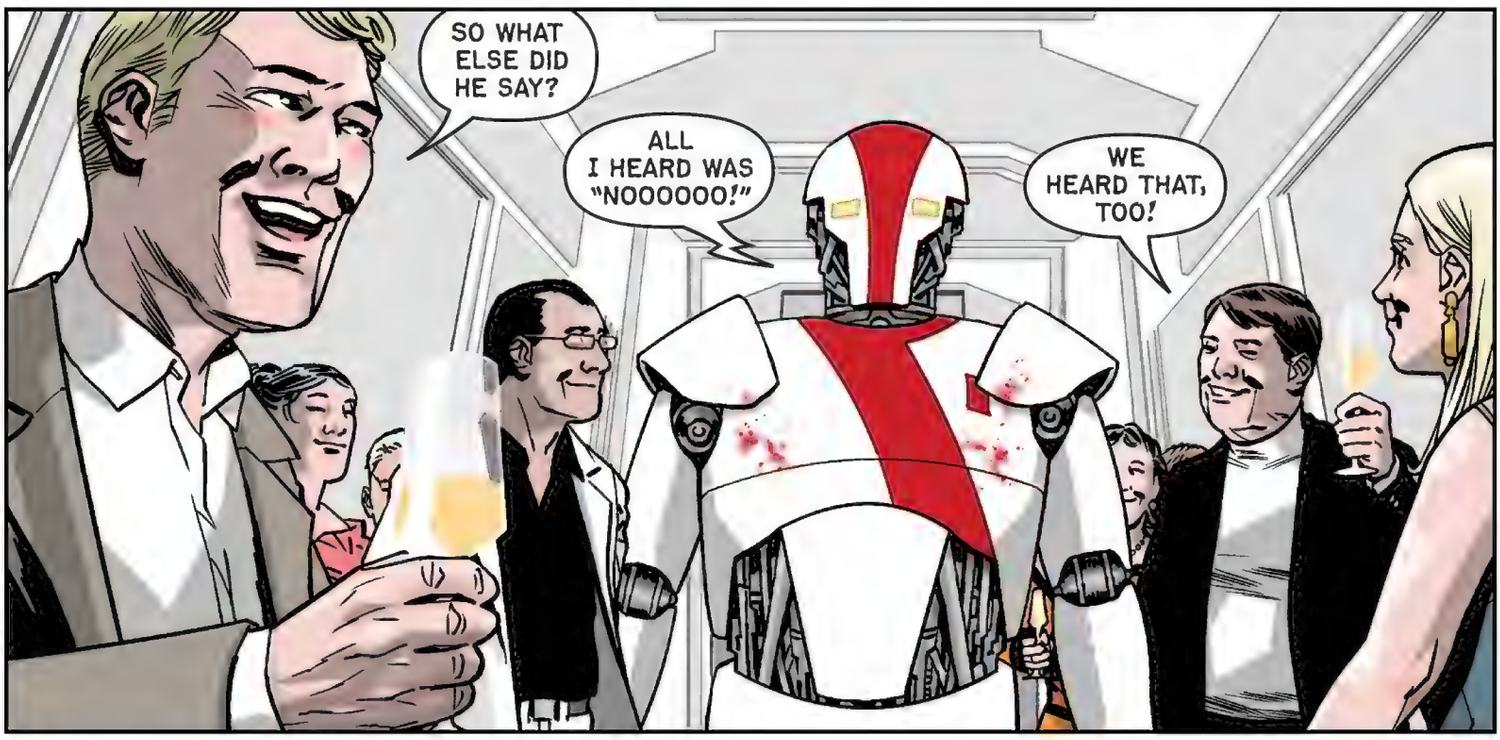
BRRAZZZAHHAWW
NO ONE EVER TOLD YOU ABOUT *KNIVES* AND *GUNFIGHTS?* HAHAHAHA!
GAAAGH!
BRRZZAW
THAT'S IT! THAT GUN'S ONLY GOT *THREE CHARGES!*
GET HIM!
CLICK
TCH!
FINE!
TA-TA!

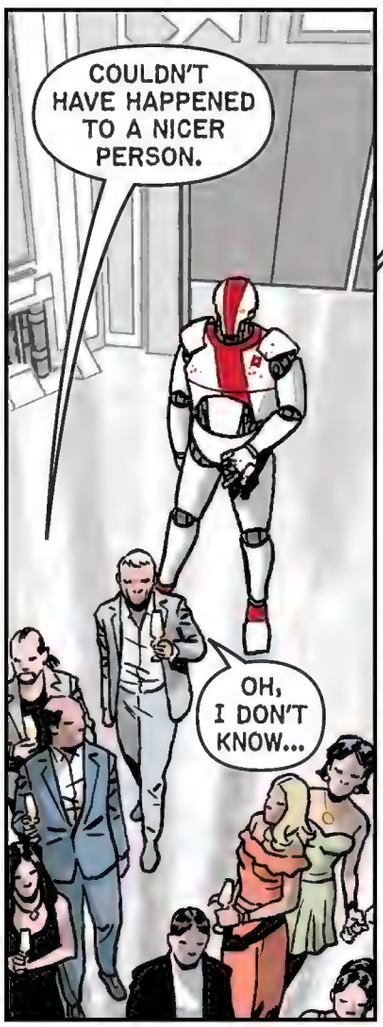

CHOOOOM
TAKE THAT!
FRAKOOOM
SKRAAAKT
WHOOPS!
KRAAKK
YES, YOU LOSERS! THE FITTEST!
KiTOOOSH

DO YOU READ, ARK TWO?
THIS IS THE BOSS.
WE'VE HAD A LITTLE... ACCIDENT ON ARK ONE.
VERY GOOD, SIR. WE'VE GOT YOUR TRACKING SIGNAL AND ARE ALREADY ON OUR WAY.
FANTASTIC. I SEE YOU.
EH?
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, SIR?
OF...OF COURSE.
I'M...I'M PERFECT.
UFF!
THE BOSS REALLY MADE A MESS, DIDN'T HE?
"MOVE FAST AND BREAK THINGS," HA HA!

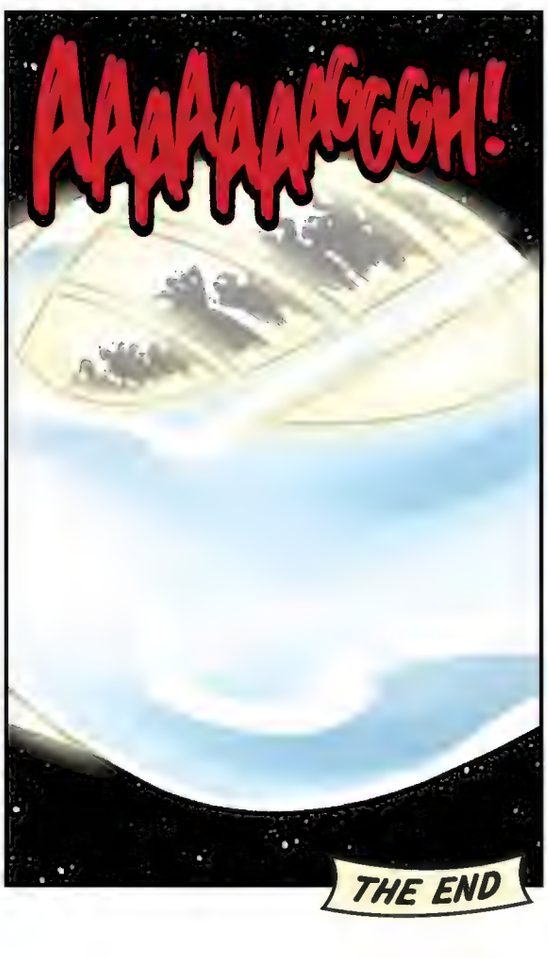
WE'RE HERE, SIR!
FINALLY!
GET ME OUT OF HERE!
OH DEAR...
I AM... SORRY, SIR.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? I'M THE BOSS! COME HERE!
WHAT A SHAME!
CHEERS!
NO! NO!
YOU CAN'T LEAVE ME! I OWN YOU! I OWN ALL OF YOU!

NOOOOOOOO!


SO WHAT ELSE DID HE SAY?
ALL I HEARD WAS "NOOOOOO!"
WE HEARD THAT, TOO!

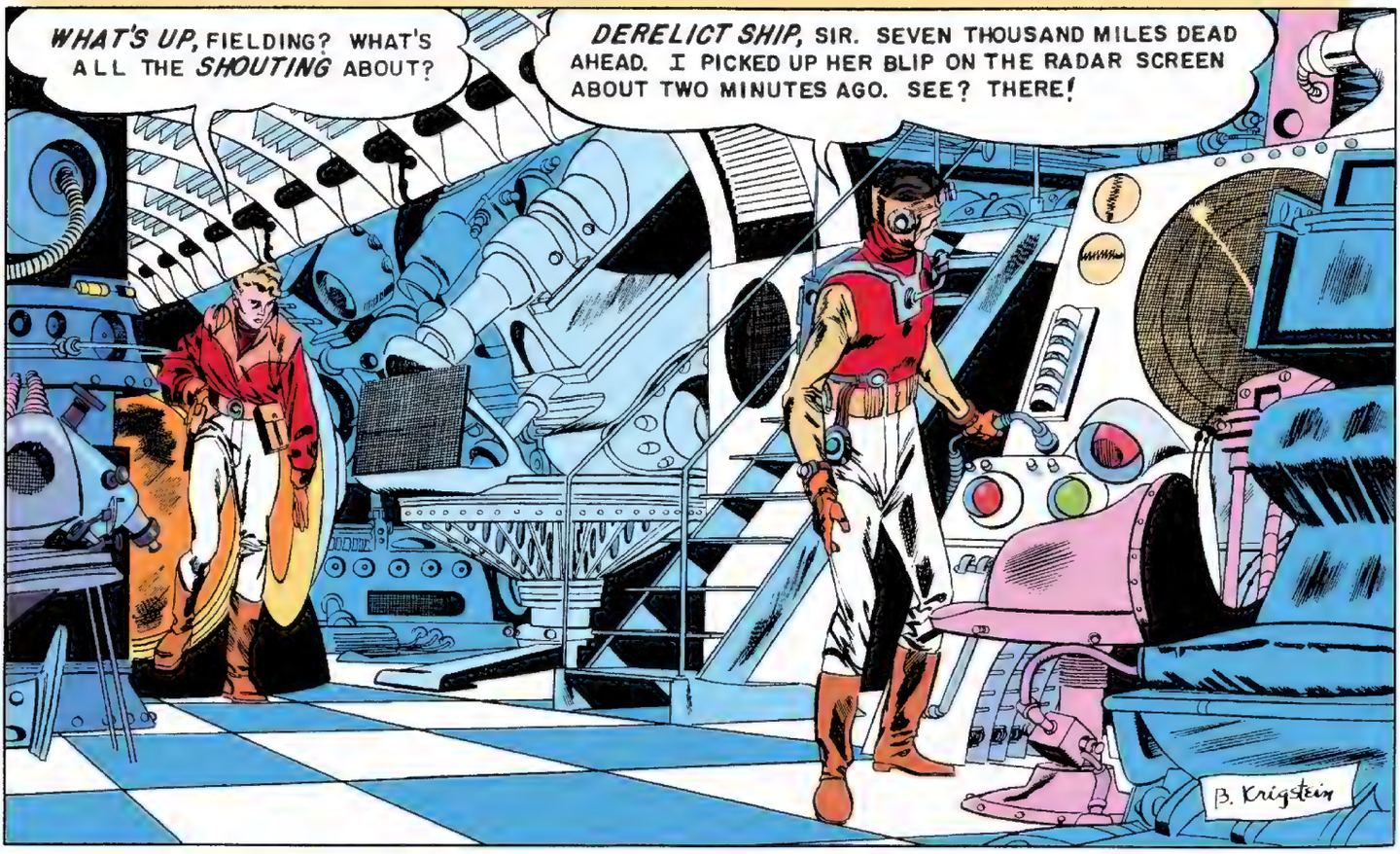

COULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED TO A NICER PERSON.
OH, I DON'T KNOW...

...I COULD THINK OF A FEW MORE PEOPLE HERE WHO COULD USE THE SAME TREATMENT.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
WAIT... WHAT'S...WHAT'S THAT ON THE ROBO--?
OH DEAR...


AAAAAAAGGGH!
THE END

DERELICT SHIP

CAPTAIN VANCE KAYE LABORED ACROSS THE SYNTHETICALLY GRAVITATED DECK PLATES OF HIS GALACTIC PATROL ROCKET CRUISER IN RESPONSE TO THE INTERCOM'S URGENT PLEADING AND SWUNG WIDE THE HATCH DOOR TO THE RADAR DETECTION ROOM...


WHAT'S UP, FIELDING? WHAT'S ALL THE SHOUTING ABOUT?
DERELICT SHIP, SIR. SEVEN THOUSAND MILES DEAD AHEAD. I PICKED UP HER BLIP ON THE RADAR SCREEN ABOUT TWO MINUTES AGO. SEE? THERE!
B. Krigstein

LIEUTENANT FIELDING TURNED TO HIS COMMANDING OFFICER...

CAPTAIN KAYE SNAPPED ON THE SHIP'S INTERCOM AS HE SAT DOWN IN THE SEAT LIEUTENANT FIELDING HAD VACATED FOR HIM...

ATTENTION, GYRO CONTROL. ATTENTION, POWER PLANT. STAND BY FOR INSTRUCTIONS. WE'RE STOPPING!
WE'LL BE ALONGSIDE IN... LET'S SEE.. FORTY MORE SECONDS, SIR!
1

CAPTAIN KAYE NODDED...

GYRO CONTROL... *REVERSE SHIP'S DIRECTION 180°!*

THIS IS *GYRO CONTROL, NOW REVERSING SHIP'S DIRECTION 180°..*

HE STUDIED HIS WATCH, CHECKING THE BLIP ON THE RADAR SCREEN AS IT LOOMED LARGER AND LARGER...

POWER PLANT, GET READY TO BLAST TO A *STOP* WHEN I *GIVE* THE *WORD.* TWENTY SECONDS... TEN SECONDS... FIVE... FOUR... THREE... TWO...

...ONE... *NOW!*

THE SHIP SHUDDERED. DEEP WITHIN ITS ALLOY LINED BOWELS, THE AWAKENED ATOMIC ENGINES ROARED...

HOLD IT... HOLD IT... *NOW... CUT POWER!*

POWER OFF!

THE SHIP HUNG IN SILENCE IN THE VAST GULF OF SPACE. CAPTAIN KAYE SNAPPED ON THE VIEWSCREEN...

NO SIGN OF *DAMAGE* ON 'ER, EH, CAPTAIN?

NO! SHE LOOKS VERY *SOUND.* SHE'S AN *OLD* MODEL, THOUGH, *ISN'T* SHE?

FIELDING THUMBED THROUGH THE ROCKET SPOTTER'S GUIDE...

THAT'S THE *Y-75,* A *CARGO CARRIER,* SIR. *BUILT* ABOUT *THIRTY YEARS* AGO. TYPE DECLARED *OBSOLETE* AT LEAST *TWENTY* YEARS AGO...

THAT MEANS SHE'S BEEN *FLOATING* OUT HERE FOR OVER *TWENTY YEARS,* FIELDING!

THAT'S *RIGHT,* SIR. WONDER WHAT *HAPPENED?*

GET INTO YOUR *SUIT,* FIELDING. WE'LL TAKE A *LOOK!*

THE LIEUTENANT AND THE CAPTAIN DRESSED IN THEIR SPACESUITS...

WHY THE *MANIA* FOR SEARCHING THROUGH EVERY DERELICT SHIP WE *RUN* ACROSS, CAPTAIN? THEY'RE *USUALLY PRETTY GRISLY SIGHTS...*

PERSONAL REASONS, FIELDING. MAYBE *SOMEDAY,* I'LL *TELL* YOU.

THE TWO SPACESUIT-CLAD PATROL OFFICERS STEPPED INTO THE AIRLOCK OF THEIR SHIP...

OPEN 'ER *UP,* FIELDING!

RIGHT, SIR!

THE OUTER AIRLOCK DOOR SWUNG WIDE, REVEALING THE DISTANT PINPOINT STARS AND THE GHOSTLY SHAPE OF THE DERELICT CARGO SHIP FLOATING BESIDE THEIR PATROL CRUISER. THE MEN PUSHED INTO SPACE...

GOT YOUR *TOOL KIT*, FIELDING?

GOT IT HERE, SIR!

THE FORCE OF THEIR PUSH-OFF CARRIED THEIR WEIGHTLESS BODIES ACROSS THE ABYSS THAT SEPARATED THE TWO SHIPS...

THE OUTER AIRLOCK DOOR IS *SEALED*, FIELDING. WE'LL HAVE TO *BURN* IT OPEN.

YES, SIR!

THE OXY-ALUMINUM TORCH BLAZED BRIGHTLY, LIKE A TINY STAR, AS FIELDING CUT AWAY THE AIRLOCK DOOR FROM ITS RECESSED HINGES...

THERE WE ARE, SIR!

GOOD!

THE CAPTAIN STEPPED INTO THE DERELICT SHIP... FIELDING CLOSE BEHIND...

GOOD LORD, SIR! HOW MANY BODIES *ARE* THERE? THE Y-75 WAS A *TWO-MAN* CARGO CARRIER.

LOOKS LIKE THIS SHIP HAD *PASSENGERS*, FIELDING. I... I...

THE CAPTAIN KNELT AND EXAMINED ONE OF THE PARTIALLY ROTTED BODIES LYING GROTESQUELY ON THE Y-75'S DECK PLATES...

LOOKS LIKE THE *BACTERIA* HAD A *FIELD DAY* TILL THE *HEATING* SYSTEM FAILED, EH, CAPTAIN?

SEE IF THERE'S A *LOG*, FIELDING.

FIELDING BEGAN TO RUMMAGE THROUGH THE ROCKET SHIP'S CONTROL ROOM. THE CAPTAIN REMAINED, KNEELING BESIDE THE BODY...

HERE IT IS, CAPTAIN! THINK IT WILL *TELL* US HOW THEY *DIED*?

I *HOPE* SO. *READ* IT TO ME, LIEUTENANT!

FIELDING OPENED THE LOG...

'FLIGHT NO. 134. JAN. 14TH: LEFT BOSTON PORT WITH CARGO OF MACHINE TOOLS AND...'

SKIP THAT! GET TO WHEN THEY PICKED UP THESE *PASSENGERS!*

LIEUTENANT FIELDING THUMBED THROUGH THE Y-75'S LOG...
LET'S SEE. 'FEBRUARY 8TH: ARRIVED AND DELIVERED CARGO.' NOTHING HERE. 'FEBRUARY 12TH: STARTED HOME.' NO... WAIT! HERE'S SOMETHING, CAPTAIN! 'FEBRUARY 19TH: BAD LUCK TODAY.'
'...WANDERING ASTEROID STRUCK SHIP AT 0900, SMASHING OUTER HULL PLATES IN THE FORWARD SECTION...'
GOOD LORD! WHAT WAS THAT, KEN?
SOUNDED LIKE WE RAN INTO SOMETHING, BERT. LET'S TAKE A LOOK!
'ATTEMPT TO WELD BREAK FAILED. WILL HAVE TO MAKE EMERGENCY LANDING. LOSING CABIN PRESSURE RAPIDLY...'
GIVE IT UP, BERT! LET'S CHECK OUR LOCATION AND HEAD FOR THE NEAREST PLANET.
GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT, KEN.
'FEBRUARY 21ST! MADE EMERGENCY LANDING ON AN UNCHARTED PLANET IN SOLAR SYSTEM 5-C119...'
'PROCEEDED WITH REPAIRS...'
THAT OUGHT TO DO IT, KEN.
WAIT, BERT! LISTEN...
'UPON COMPLETING REPAIRS, WE WERE APPROACHED BY CREATURES OF THE PLANET...'
WHAT THE...?
EARTHMEN! IT WOULD BE WISE, GENTLEMEN, IF YOU OFFERED NO RESISTANCE!
'I WAS COMPLETELY FLOORED BY THE PRESENCE OF EARTHMEN ON THAT GOD-FORSAKEN SPHERE...'
OFFER NO RESISTANCE?! WHY SHOULD WE?
YOU MEAN YOU DO NOT KNOW WHERE YOU ARE?
4

WE LANDED HERE TO MAKE REPAIRS. AS FAR AS WE KNOW, THIS PLANET IS UNCHARTED.
THIS, GENTLEMEN, IS ELBA II!
ELBA II! GOOD LORD!
YES, GENTLEMEN. THE EXILE PLANET WHERE ALL ANTI-DEMOCRACISTS AND 'HATE-MONGERS' AND 'TOTALITARIANISTS' ARE SENT!
OUR COMING HERE WAS AN ACCIDENT! THE LOCATION OF ELBA II IS A GUARDED SECRET.
NATURALLY! YOUR DECADENT DEMOCRATIC EARTH GOVERNMENT WANTS TO BE SURE WE NEVER ESCAPE...NEVER RETURN!
BUT NOW, THANKS TO YOUR IGNORANCE, OUR CHANCE TO ESCAPE HAS COME!
IN OUR SHIP? NEVER!
BERT! WAIT!
WAIT, NOTHING, KEN! THESE LICE BELONG HERE, AND HERE THEY'LL STAY! THEY WERE SENT HERE BECAUSE THEY PREACHED INTOLERANCE AND WANTED TO TAKE AWAY OUR FREEDOM! THERE'S NO PLACE FOR FILTH LIKE THEM IN OUR WORLD...
ENOUGH! WE ARE GOING BACK WITH YOU. IF YOU REFUSE TO TAKE US, WE'LL KILL YOU!
BERT! THEY MEAN IT!
LISTEN, KEN. IT'S BETTER THAT WE DIE HERE THAN TAKE THEM BACK AND LET THEM REINFECT OUR WORLD WITH THEIR KIND OF DISEASED IDEALS!
BERT, I'VE GOT A WIFE AND KID BACK ON EARTH...
THAT'S USING YOUR HEAD, KEN. YOU WANT TO SEE YOUR WIFE AND KID AGAIN, DON'T YOU?
KEN, DON'T BE A FOOL! I WON'T LET YOU! I...
STAND BACK, KEN. WE'VE NO NEED FOR YOUR STUPID PARTNER...
NO! WAIT! DON'T!

'FEBRUARY 22ND: THEY'VE KILLED BERT AND FORCED ME TO TAKE THE Y-75 OFF. TODAY, I SAT AT THE CONTROLS, LISTENING TO THEIR WILD PLANNING...'
WHEN WE GET BACK TO EARTH, WE WILL INFILTRATE THE GOVERNMENT...
...WORK OURSELVES INTO HIGH POSITIONS...
...AND WHEN THE RIGHT TIME COMES, WE WILL BEGIN BY PITTING RACE AGAINST RACE, CREED AGAINST CREED...
...ASSASSINATE ALL THOSE WHO STAND IN OUR WAY...
...AND FINALLY TAKE OVER... SET UP THE DICTATORSHIP...DESTROY THE STUPID DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS OF FREE SPEECH AND PRESS AND RELIGION...
...AND, THEREAFTER, EDUCATE THE PEOPLE OUR WAY...
'FEBRUARY 23RD: I LISTENED TO THEIR SICKENING TALK UNTIL I COULD STAND IT NO LONGER. I THOUGHT OF MY WIFE AND CHILD, BACK ON EARTH, ENJOYING THE FREEDOM THESE MEN WANTED TO TAKE AWAY...'
WHEN IS DADDY COMING HOME, MOTHER?
SOON, SON...SOON...
'...AND I THOUGHT OF POOR BERT, LYING COLD AND STILL ON ELBA II... BERT, WHO KNEW WHAT THESE MEN WERE, AND CHOSE TO DIE RATHER THAN LET THEM RETURN TO OUR WORLD...'
'AND I THOUGHT OF MY SON GROWING UP IN THE WORLD THESE MEN PLANNED FOR HIM, A WORLD OF MILITARIZED REGIMENTED YOUTH SERVING THE STATE, SERVING THESE MEN...'
EYES...RIGHT. HAIL THE LEADERS...
'AND I KNEW THAT BERT WAS RIGHT... THAT IT WAS BETTER NEVER TO SEE MY WIFE AND SON AGAIN THAN TO LET HAPPEN WHAT THESE MEN PLANNED. SO I MADE UP MY MIND. I TURNED ON THE GYRO CONTROL... SWUNG THE SHIP AROUND...'
WHAT'S HAPPENING? WE'RE STOPPING!

'AS THEY RUSHED TO ME, I SMASHED THE GYRO INTO A MILLION PIECES...'

STOP HIM! STOP HIM!

YOU'LL NEVER GET TO EARTH! NEVER!

'...I RELEASED OUR FUEL INTO SPACE... EVERY LAST DROP...'

YOU IDIOT! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

YOU'VE CRIPPLED THE SHIP!

THAT'S RIGHT! YOU'LL FLOAT HERE UNTIL THE OXYGEN GIVES OUT OR THE HEATING SYSTEM FAILS...

'I SCREAMED AT THEM, HAPPILY...'

...AND THEN YOU'LL DIE... ALL OF YOU... HORRIBLY... SUFFOCATING... OR FREEZING...

YOU FOOL! THINK OF YOUR WIFE... YOUR SON...

'I LAUGHED, TRIUMPHANTLY...'

I DID! THAT'S JUST IT! I DID!

'AND NOW I SIT, WRITING THESE LAST FEW WORDS INTO MY LOG. THE AIR GROWS THIN AND A BLACKNESS DROPS OVER ME. I AM DYING. BUT I DIE... CONTENT...'

LIEUTENANT FIELDING CLOSED THE LOG, WHISPERING...

IT'S SIGNED... KENNETH KAYE, FIRST PILOT, Y-75 CARGO CARRIER...'

LIEUTENANT FIELDING STARED DOWN AT HIS CAPTAIN KNEELING BESIDE THE PARTIALLY ROTTED CORPSE...

I JOINED THE PATROL HOPING I'D FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM. NOW YOU KNOW WHY I WENT THROUGH EVERY DERELICT SHIP WE FOUND...

WE OWE HIM A GREAT DEAL, CAPTAIN... A GREAT DEAL...

CAPTAIN VANCE KAYE STOOD UP. HE SMILED DOWN AT THE BODY GRINNING UP GROTESQUELY FROM THE DECK PLATES...

THANKS, DAD! THANKS A LOT!

THE END

MAILBAG FROM THE ABYSS

You wanted more, so here we are with the return of *Cruel Universe*! In fact, maybe it never actually left. Haven't you heard? Time and space are an illusion . . . especially during EC's Summer of Fear!

As much as we love basking in the terror of *Epitaphs from the Abyss* and the Tormentor's new horror book *Catacomb of Torment*, we also appreciate the particularly visceral impact of science-fiction–tinged horror. Remember seeing Ridley Scott's *Alien* in the theater? Finishing those last few pages of a Richard Matheson novel? Staying up late to watch another spine-tingling episode of *The Outer Limits*? We do hope you experience all those sensations and more as you join us for a galactically monumental *twelve* issues of this second *Cruel Universe* installment.

We're itching to hear what you thought of this first issue! Are you as excited as we are to have Greg Pak, J. Holtham, David Rubín, Charlie Adlard, and Kano return to the fold? What did you think of Ann Nocenti's EC debut, and her scathing observation of social-media celebrity? We're willing to bet there aren't enough distraught face emojis to represent how much you may want to scream into the void once you finish these tales during your lunch break and/or Zoom work meeting. (Psst, your camera's on. You're welcome.)

Let us know in your letters by reaching out to us at **ecletters@onipress.com**. We promise we won't sic any murderous dolphins on you . . .

Onto your missives and musings!

Dear Grave-Digger and the EC Comics Gang,

As soon as I realized that EC Comics were coming back, I got to my local comic book store and asked them to get me a subscription. I am now officially committed to your comic book Epitaphs from the Abyss. *I'm so happy and excited to continue reading your scary stories like I did back when I started collecting the Gladstone reprints of the EC Comics back in the '90s when I was a kid. I started back when I was somewhere around 12 years old. Loved* Tales from the Crypt, Vault of Horror, *and* Haunt of Fear.

It was a huge delight to read those horror- and suspense-filled stories and then see Tales from the Crypt *on HBO. It was a good time to be a fan. My life revolves around* Tales *and EC Comics stuff all around. In the past, I got a chance to get my letter printed in a* Tales *mag and it rocked my world. Hopefully this one will one day be printed as well. I love all that you do and I want to give a big shout-out to all of the people involved in making these stories, comic books, and more. You make my life happier with your work. Thanks a million!!!*

Now I am a DJ and I go by DJ Jaws Monterrey. If EC Comics fans would like to be pals, look me up on Tiktok or Instagram as "djjawsmonterrey." Hopefully one day you get to guest-invite the classic Crypt Keeper and gang on Epitaphs *to shed some good tales as well. And, who knows? In the future, a new* Tales *movie with the Grave-Digger and friends . . .?*

I can dream, can't I?

Your big fan from Monterrey, Mexico,
DJ Jaws/Rogelio Duron de la Garza

P.S. YOU RULE THE WORLD!!!

Thank you for the kind words, DJ Jaws! For some reason, we see Ada in the club dancing to your tunes. Yes, that was a shameless *Blood Type* push, but it felt so right!

Tomb it may concern,

Since EC Comics' resurrection with Epitaphs from the Abyss *#1, I've been [meat]hooked.*

*As per my geeky mind, I have my own little Oni Press EC Comics database that I am compiling as more and more gets released. Is a guide to the different Oni Press EC Comics (*Epitaphs, Cruel Universe, Cruel Kingdom, *etc.), something you would be interested in publishing yourselves? I know I, for one, would buy this.*

On similar lines, are there any plans for tie-in merchandise?

*Upon recently rereading some of the previous comics, I have found myself more and more intrigued by the hosts. I know the Grave-Digger was involved in [*Epitaphs *#10's] "Feed the Right Wolf," but are there any plans for a story focused on one or more of the hosts in the near future?*

Thank you for reading my gore-spondence, I am really enjoying the EC Comics line. It would be great to see myself in one of these comics . . . in the relative safety of the mailbag, of course!

Yours skin-cerely,
Grotesque Glenn Turner

Gore-spondence! Glenn! Your pun game is quite on point! Spell-check be damned!

A guide to Oni Press–released EC stories may take some time, but it's definitely something for us to keep in mind! And we unfortunately do not have any EC merch at this time, though you can keep a close eye on our social media accounts in case that changes.

By now, you probably scarfed down issue #12 of *Epitaphs*, so we hope you enjoyed the horror host–centric "Final Epitaph"! And we can assure you the hosts will play a role in *Catacomb* stories, too . . . so be sure to rate their hosting abilities after you pick up a couple issues!

Thanks so much for your readership!

Dear Grave-Digger, Tormentor, and Grim Inquisitor:

Greetings from the South of the World!

I've been aware of the world of Tales from the Crypt *since I was a kid but I wasn't aware about the comics until much, much later.*

It was with great surprise that late last year I found out about EC rising from the grave, and since then I've been getting every number digitally as they've come out [getting the floppies here is the stuff of horror, and not the fun kind], but this week I received the Vol. 1 trade of Epitaphs from the Abyss *and I've enjoyed revisiting those first stories and their great writing and art in the physical realm [and to think they've only gotten better since!].*

Of course, I've also read Cruel Universe, Shiver SuspenStories, *and* Cruel Kingdom, *and I think they'll manage to stand the test of time. The sheer bloodiness and cruelty of the last* Kingdom *is the kind of stuff that is hard to pull off grave-fully. I especially liked "Headmistress" from that number.*

I'm eagerly awaiting winter [your summer] and getting to read the new series, as well as the last issue of Epitaphs *and whatever else the future might hold.*

For many more years of spooking and haunting!

Jorge González B.
Chillán, Chile

P.S. I hope somebody picks these up to publish in Spanish so I can share them with my non-English-speaking friends and family. Always love a chance to give people nightmares, heh!

Jorge! We're so grateful you're able to read these via digital and thank you for reading across the titles and genres! We're hoping you get to enjoy *Cruel Universe 2* in the same way!

My Dear Mr. Grave-Digger,

I hope this letter finds you digging away in your yard. I have been a fan of EC since I was a wee lad back in the '70s [the 1970s, that is] reading my MAD *magazines every month and was thrilled to see Oni Press making a deal to bring back my beloved EC. I have been reading everything you are putting out and even buying the variants. The art of the covers has been incredible.*

Which titles are you planning on keeping running, and are you going to create some new titles? I appreciate your time in reading this, and please keep these books coming!!!!

Regards,
Steve "The Voice" White

Thanks so much for your letter! We'll make sure Mr. Grave-Digger receives it. We may have to bury it deep in the ground, but we'll do our due diligence. Hee hee.

Keep those letters coming! Reading your ghoulish thoughts gives us a break from just continuously staring into the void. Much appreciated!

Next issue: Alien autopsies! The lost art of painting and dying! And a faint voice from an overhead speaker . . .

Ominous enough for you? Good! Join us in the next issue of *Cruel Universe 2*! And don't forget to pick up *Catacomb of Torment* #2, as well as our first limited series, *Blood Type*. There won't be a shortage of EC goodness this year, so don't miss out.

INSPIRED BY WONDER–
DRIVEN TO DESTROY

SCIENCE

AN ENTERTAINING COMIC

ALL-NEW TALES OF ENTROPY AND OBLIVION IN THE IMMORTAL EC TRADITION!

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CECIL CASTELLUCCI | CHRIS CONDON
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BEN H. WINTERS

ARTISTS JONATHAN CASE | JAVIER FERNANDEZ | DANIEL IRIZARRI | KANO
PETER KRAUSE | DAVID LAPHAM
LEOMACS | DAN MCDAID | ANDREA MUTTI
RILEY ROSSMO | DAVID RUBÍN
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COVER GREG SMALLWOOD

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A MONSTROUS NEW AN ENTERTAINING EC COMIC MILESTONE BEGINS IN

BLOOD TYPE™ Nº 1

OUT OF THE PAGES OF ***EPITAPHS FROM THE ABYSS***, A **CUNNING VAMPIRE** HAS COME TO STALK THE PERFECT ISLAND PARADISE . . .

. . . BUT AN **ENTIRELY DIFFERENT** KIND OF **BLOODSUCKER** IS HUNTING HER INSTEAD!

HUGO AWARD NOMINEE
CORINNA BECHKO
(GREEN LANTERN: EARTH ONE)

EISNER AWARD WINNER
ANDREA SORRENTINO
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EISNER AWARD WINNER
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EC'S FIRST STANDALONE HORROR SPECTACLE BEGINS IN JUNE!

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JUST REMEMBER...
THERE IS NO ESCAPE!

TERROR

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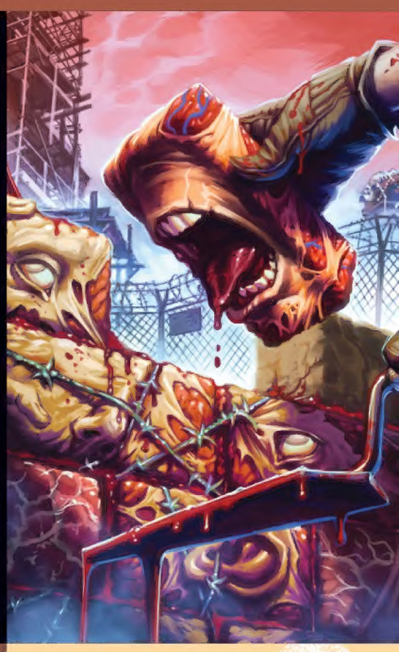
THE BLOODY NEW ONGOING SERIES CONTINUES WITH MORE FATAL FABLES!



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ART / DESIGN BY:
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COMING NEXT MONTH—
WARPING YOUR REALITY!

SCIENCE

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MORE BIZARRE TALES OF ENTROPY AND OBLIVION IN THE IMMORTAL EC TRADITION!

CHRIS CONDON AND
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DAVE WIELGOSZ AND
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CRUEL UNIVERSE™

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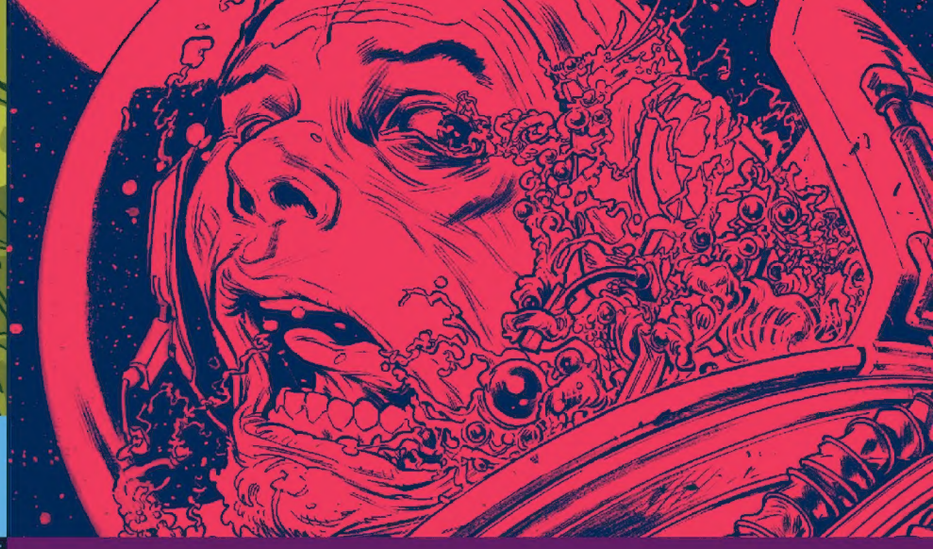
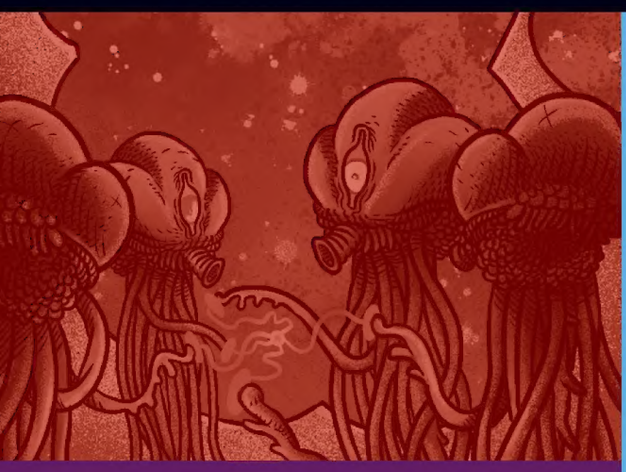


ALL NEW TALES OF ENTROPY

AND OBLIVION



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